Do Democratic States Go to War With Each Other? A Re-Examination of the Question

Michael Gordon Jackson

*Department of Political Science*

*Regis College*

*Weston, MA. 02493-1571*

Michael.Jackson@regiscolleg.edu

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*Abstract:* Instructors often assert in international relations classrooms the generalization that democracies never wage war against one another, especially during the time-period of the modern nation state system that emerged during the 17th century. And, indeed, the record of conflicts and wars that took place during the past few centuries seems to support this argument. Yet, in light of the Russo-Georgian armed clash of 2008 (both states perceived as “democracies” by the international community) and the increasingly bellicose tensions between the U.K. and Argentina regarding the unresolved issue about the status and sovereignty of the Falklands/Malvinas Islands in the South Atlantic, the point that democracies do not war against each other may be questionable. In my paper, I will approach the puzzle by examining the dynamics of the UK-Argentina dispute over the Falkland Islands and current scholarship witch is more critical of Democratic Peace Theory (DPT).

***Introduction***

In a recent article, Steven Walt recalls how as a new scholar, “I was convinced that systematic scholarly research could uncover and verify timeless truths about international politics and foreign policy.” He then notes how elusive that goal has been (Walt 2012). Strong theory building in the field of international relations (IR) scholarship has been difficult to achieve. At best, one can advance compelling generalizations about various puzzles the scholar wants to investigate in IR. However, there is one theory that many of us present to our students with great confidence. What is it? Namely, for a variety of reasons, democratic states, both historically and during the modern era, do not wage war against other democracies. It is called Democratic Peace Theory (DPT). DPT has become of the ‘gold standards’ of IR theory, supported by statistical surveys, empirical research, and common sense speculation.

When explaining what DPT describes and explains, writers inevitably give pay homage to the political theorist Immanuel Kant. In his essay, *Perpetual Peace*, published in 1795, Kant argued that in a world of republics populated by citizens, not subjects, of monarchs and autocracy, people would never support going to war for reasons not based upon self defense. A world of democracies would end war (Kant 1795)*.* Kantian rational, if not idealistic, analysis is the bedrock underneath DPT.

Especially since the 1960s, a whole cottage industry of books, articles, essays, research, and statistical studies has focused on the question of how viable DPT really is. And, it must be said, the consensus until recently has been strongly supportive of the basic tenets of DPT. Both historically and during the modern era, a “democratic peace” exists and influences the behavior of states, leaders, and public opinion. Various statistical works frequently demonstrate robust statistical correlations between periods of non-war and the presence of democratic political systems and orders. Indeed, since the era of the ancient Greek city-states, major scholars stress that DPT governed politics even during the Peloponnesian War.

 Still, as noted by some critics over the years, DPT is not so theoretical solid that it is immune from critical questions. Some scholars have expressed caveats and caution about what they describe as an unusually pervasive agreement about an IR theory. Criticism is usually made about questionable methodologies or definitions, e.g., how does one define what democracy actual is? How many deaths does it take to declare a conflict a war? Certain things do not add up. As will be described, the historical record does show some examples of supposed “democratic” states waging war upon each other. The record also suggests that there have a fair number of “near misses” between democratic states during which armed conflict was only narrowly avoided. Supporters of DPT will usually describe these cases as anomalies, as exceptions to the rule. But what does prevent democracies from not waging war against one another? Does peace lead to democratic order between states? Does democratic practice lead to peace? Can these questions be answered by examining trends within existing political structures and institutions, or looking at the evolution and development of political norms that result in democratic peace?.

This paper will explore these questions more from the critical side. Indeed, as will be shown, one can find in the literature more and more doubt about the reality, let alone existence, of DPT as the 21st century progresses. Several areas will be explored in this paper. First, it willbriefly survey some of the main arguments and works that support DPT. Secondly, it will investigate the findings and conclusions of a so far modest, but growing, group of scholars who are critical of the “uncritical” approach to DPT. Thirdly, based upon a persuasive simulation of DPT, six categories will be described that in fact might result in democracies being capable of clashing with other democracies, e.g., the necessity of economic nationalism, the eruption of conflicts over resources during an age of climate change, the effects of humanitarian disasters and mass migrations and displacement of peoples around the globe, or the breakup of some democratic states into separatist homelands. A case study will then be presented of a potential flashpoint where rising tensions and belligerence between two democracies, the United Kingdom (UK) and Argentina (GOA), over the territory and sovereign status of the Falklands/Malvinas Island in the South Atlantic might escalate into a repeat of the short, but bloody, war that took place between the UK and GOA in 1982. In conclusion, the argument will be advanced that nationalism is still very much alive and could lead to clashes between states in the future, including democratic ones, be they “mature” or immature in nature, or in a state of transition towards democracy. Some realist tenets are still persuasive in forecasting when wars break out. DPT must be subjected to more rigorous, critical, analysis in the face of changing global conditions.

***Development & Defense of DPT***

To be fair, one can make the argument that DPT in its modern form can be traced back to even President Woodrow Wilson in 1917, with his rhetoric and actions about making the world safe for democracy, establishing the League of Nations, and enshrining the goals of ending war and relying upon collective security alliances between democratic states. However, probably the first scholar, who advanced key features associated with DPT, was Dean Bapst. In an obscure journal, the *Wisconsin Socialist*, published in 1964, it was Bapst who, after examining data amassed by another scholar that covered wars fought between 1789 and 1941, made the crucial observation (Bapst 1964, p. 10):

“….no wars have been fought between independent nations with elective governments. Such nations have fought many wars against autocratic governments, and even some against their own colonies who wanted to become independent, but those nations have not waged war against each other.”

It was in the 1980s that further positive studies of DPT began to be published. Michael Doyle wrote two seminal articles about DPT that described the connection between Kantian peace theory, liberal political orders, and foreign policies Doyle (1983; 1986). The articles by Doyle helped launch the whole “democratic peace theory” debate that subsequently took place

However, the scholarly avalanche supportive of DPT can rightly be attributed to the following works and influence of Bruce Russett starting from the early 1990s, In this post cold war environment, the argument “democracies had rarely if ever gone to war against each other” began to be accepted as empirical fact. It was Russett who makes a strong case that one can find evidence in favor of DPT by examining the behavior of democratic Greek city-states during the classical era.

In 1992, Russett published a detailed analysis of whether democracies waged war against each during the Peloponnesian War. Applying the tools of empirical and quantitative analysis, he concluded that in spite of some key “exceptions”, a norm was beginning to emerge among these Greek city-states that made those that were democratic not willing to fight other democratic city-states. According to Russett, “Much textual evidence shows democratic states reluctant to fight each other, precisely because of their ties of constitution and ideology” (Russett 1992, p. 428)[[1]](#footnote-2)

A year later, Russett once more forcefully advances the argument for DPT. He lays out “inherent reasons” why democracies do not wage war against one another. To Russett, democracies are better able to handle disputes diplomatically because of their mutual respect for constitutional law and processes and because they are linked by political alliances, trading partnerships, and habits conducive to maintaining political stability. Norms exist within democratic states that foster “culture, perceptions and practices that permit compromise” and pacific resolutions of disputes. Political structures such as divided government and separation of powers also help democracies keep the peace amongst them (Russett 1993, p. 31)[[2]](#footnote-3)

Other scholars followed Bruce Russett’s lead during the 1990s. For example, Francis Fukuyama’s much discussed “end of history” proposition after the Cold War integrated elements of DPT (Fukayama, 1992). James Lee Ray published an extensive literature review of DPT. He concluded that “Well developed theoretical bases reinforce a lengthy list of systematic empirical analyses in support of DPT. Viewed holistically, the literature exhibits a “balance” towards validity for the theory” (Ray, 1998). There were other important DPT studies published during this period (Rousseau et al, 1996) (Weart 1998).

Statistical investigations of DPT were also generated, with similarly positive conclusions about the efficacy of democratic peace arguments. Huth created a massive data set which analyzed 20th century territorial conflicts. Using a six point scale, of which 5 correlated with democracy, and stressing the importance of whether democratic leaders were politically accountable, Huth argues that the data, in general, supports DPT (Huth, 2002). In 2002, conducting another statistical analysis of the record, Bremer similarly concluded that even after controlling for large numbers of variables “conflict reducing effect(s) remains strong” among democracies (Bremer, 1993).

The post-Cold War era was indeed the Russettian inspired “golden age” of democratic peace studies. However, it is beyond the scope of this paper to comprehensively examine the corpus of DPT literature. But, as will be shown next, there was a scattering of critics during this era who took issue with DPT. Indeed, in the aftermath of the Iraq War 2003, the Arab Spring of 2011, or the Russo-Georgian border war of 2008, there is a growing number of scholars who are much more cautious about uncritically accepting the central arguments of DPT.

***Criticisms of DPT***

As described earlier, DPT is usually investigated within two basic research foci - structural-institutionalism and normative theoretical approaches. Structural theory assumes that institutions within democracies will inhibit the ability or ambitions of political leaders who want to wage war without the backing of their public opinion. Public opinion will not rationally support initiating war against a fellow democracy. With the normative approach, it is assumed that political leaders and public opinion have absorbed the thinking and behaviors associated with liberal ideology – an ideology that disagrees with the likelihood of wars being waged between liberal democratic states. Perception is very important here. Wars take place if political leaders suggest that potential opponents are not democratic. Indeed “normative explanations of the democratic peace theory have been shown to be more persuasive than structural ones (Chan, 1997, p. 92).

In fact, some scholars did question the rush by others to embrace DPT. Christopher Layne argued that the structural thesis for why democracies don’t fight wars against one another is faulty. In fact, according to Layne, if democratic public opinion was as powerful as ascribed, democracies would have peaceful relations with all states “whether democratic or not”. He describes several “near misses” in which democracies during crises with one another went to the brink of war. Real threats and actions took place between the parties. The structure and normative cultures of these democratic states did not prevent them from getting to edge of actual armed conflict(Layne, 1994, p. 12).

Other scholars argued that statist claims on behalf of DPT were overblown. Examining differing methodological approaches in DPT studies, David Spiro points out that democratic peace theories, “…are based on analyses that are highly sensitive to the ways that they select definitions of the key terms of democracy and war, and to the methods they choose for statistical analysis” (Spiro, 1996, p. 214

While accepting some parts of DPT, some critics attempted to refine the theory. Mansfield and Snyder, in an important work that looks at why democracies go to war in the first place, emphasized the fact that within “incomplete democratic transitions” in states with weak political institutions democratization had stalled before “mature” democratic practices took hold, the chances for war increased. As will be later demonstrated, this is a key argument that will be explored in this paper, particularly in relation to the case study of UK and GOA relations over the status of the Falkland/Malvinas Islands (Mansfield and Snyder, 2005, p. 4).

Critics were also concerned about the lack of definitional rigor within the DPT debate. Eric Robinson was especially troubled by the reliance upon ancient historical evidence. From his perspective, “Evidence from the period in and around the Peloponnesian War indicated that not only did ancient democracies go to war with each other, they did so with relatively high frequency”(Robinson, 2001, p. 593).

Questions about how to define democracy and war do have a point. Yes, ancient Athens waged war against a fellow democratic city-state Syracuse. But can a democracy really be a democracy if they embrace slavery or prevent significant parts of their polities from participating in politics?” As for war, what conditions or metrics need to exist to call a conflict a war? Should the *Correlates of War Project* definition that only conflicts in which the death toll reaches 1,000 deaths be accepted as the proper description of when a true war took place? (Correlates of War Project, 2013)*.* One supporter of DPT concedes that in many of the studies “the various rating schemes that have been used to assess democracy have been criticized for being subjective, ethnocentric, inconsistent, incomplete, and biased” (Chan, p. 65). Without more convincing clear definitions, how can quantitative studies of DPT be truly significant, reliable and valid?

What can annoying, too, is the tone of certainty expressed by some advocates of DTP. Indeed, it reminds one of the reputed approach that Margaret Thatcher would adopt with her subordinates, i.e., when discussing her preferred decision a state of TINA would take place “There is no alternative” to what was being argued. Rummel is especially prone to this when promoting DPT. He has produced much work regarding DPT. In 1997, Rummel conducted an exhaustive historical survey of all major wars between 1816 and 1991. He focused on the relationships between “dyads”, i.e., between 350 pairs of nations. He concluded that not one pairing of war included two opposing democracies (Rummel, 1997, p. 13). Indeed, Rummel stressed that “democracy is a general cure for political or collective violence of any kind*”* (Rummel, 1999). Rummel did provide a detailed definition of a democracy:

1. Regular lections for the most powerful government positions.
2. Competitive political parties.
3. Near universal franchise.
4. Secret balloting
5. Importance of political and civil liberties (human rights)

Questioning and answering himself in this article, Rummel forcefully makes the case for DPT. He maintains that the prevalence of “statistical studies” supporting DPT; there have been no wars between democracies since 1816:

“Now some statistics. If one defines an international war as any military engagements in which 1,000 or more were killed, then 353 pairs nations….engaged in such wars between 1816-1991. None were between two democracies, 155 pairs were a democracy and non democracy. And 198 involved two non democracies fighting each other”.

 Acknowledging the work of Bruce Russett and James Lee Ray and Spencer Weart, he then argues that there are no convincing exceptions to the argument that democracies do not fight one another. “None were found.” Well established democracies do not make war on each other. Period.

“Statistical assertions” such as Rummel’s beg for follow up critical analysis. Problems abound within the literature about statistics and what is described as Militarized Interstate Disputes (MIDs) – involving the use of force, displays of force, explicit threats to use force – between democratic states. Whose definitions and statistics are most reliable? Rummel’s statistical interpretations? Bruce Russett’s?

Furthermore, not all statistical DPT studies strongly support the theory. In an interesting paper by Frank Wayman in 2002, he argued that according to his quantitative analysis of 2,000 MIDs since 1816, using ‘Correlates of War Project“data, he identified sixty wars that have been between liberal states”. Wayman also presented a nuanced interpretation; MIDs are almost always between two states and are “usually unreciprocated or tit for tat incidents”- rarely do they escalate vertically. However,”Statistics should be used with caution…the MIDs data do contain surprising cases of intense armed belligerence between two liberal states” (Wayman, 2002, p. 5).

Indeed, what about the list of “wars” between democracies that do seem to exist? Were they MIDs or other forms of state upon state conflict? One especially interesting case of a “near miss” between two democratic states was the “Cod Wars” between the UK and Iceland between the 1950s and 1970s over fishing rights - a clash that did result in some use of armed force. Or, what about the fact that democracies have in fact prepared for war against other democracies. For many years, democratic Canada during the first decades of the 20th century had a secret war plan “defense scheme one” to use against the United States if war in fact broke out between the two states (Bell, 1997). Moreover, during the same time period, the US had developed war plans to use against the UK and Canada if hostilities had broken out (Carlson 2005). However improbable, three of the most mature Anglo democracies prepared contingency plans just in case war broke out. Or, how does DPT explain the outbreak of the mini-war between “democratic” Russia and the state of Georgia in 2008?? Other examples can be found in the historical record. The point is, does the DPT literature convincingly explain away these “wars” as mere anomalies with the theory? Or, do real weaknesses exist within the structure and assumptions of DPT?

In the literature of late, the approach to the debate by scholars is becoming decidedly more nuanced, if not critical. One scholar examines the turmoil of the “Arab Spring”, and concludes that DPT must be re-thought as it appears not to apply to countries in undergoing “turbulent” democratic transitions(Rada, 2012). Sebastian Rosato examined in detail the “flawed logic” of DPT (Rosato, 2003). Christopher Hobson and Jonathan Wright have recently offered cautionary comments about the strength of DPT (Hobson, 2011) (Wright, 2010). A few years earlier, another scholar pointed out the presence of “selection bias” used in defense of the DPT (Slantchev et al, 2005).

A very recent statistical simulation about DPT has resulted in some critical thinking about the certainty of DPT. Wikistrat conducted a “DPT Challenge Simulation” in July 2012. What was the theme of the simulation? Examine the question of whether the predictions of DPT would remain durable in the years ahead. One of the participants noted that “in the post-Westphalian era states must now share with non state actors specifically global corporations whose resources and influence can exceed that of nations. Suddenly, a conflict between democracies, aligned with opposing corporate interests, becomes conceivable.” In short, during the rest of this century, conditions of economic nationalism may prevail, just as during the mercantilist era of several hundred years ago. In fact, immature democracies may exhibit the strongest tendency to go to war against one another (Prescott, 2012).

Another skeptic, Dave Feinman zeros in on some of the major problems associated with DPT:

To say that democracies rarely if ever go to war with one another may be an accurate review of history when looking on the face of historical circumstance, but to use this conjecture as a predictive tool for future behavior of states seems premature when few can agree on the proof that lies behind the theory. A review of the most influential papers written on this question reveals that the democratic peace theory takes advantage of circumstance and coincidence in

history, but falls short of having explanatory power and lacks empirical basis.

This is not to say that in recent years, defenders of DPT have disappeared. For example, David Placek optimistically argues:

The institutional and normative aspects of the democratic peace proposition, thus, provide a very clear, logical reason why the global spread of democracy will result in greater international peace: democratic political institutions make it difficult for governments to initiate war without the consent of the electorate, and the accompanying cultural norms mean democracies will favour a peaceful means of conflict resolution with one another.

However, much more in keeping with the skeptical POV is a recent piece looking at the issue within a neo-classical realist paradigm. The authors contend “that explanations of the democratic peace have degenerated into theoretical stalemate” (Coetzee 2012). The structuralist bias and normative nature associated with DPT makes it very difficult to create alternative theories about democratic peace. Fresh approaches are needed to analyze the types of conflicts that democracies will most likely face for the remainder of the 21st century.

***Conditions for War between Democracies***

In 2012, Wikistrats conducted a simulation about DPT and whether it might still survive in the 21st century. Over 90 experts from around the globe participated in the week long simulation (Barnett, 2012). During the simulation, they identified six broad categories of conflicts that could possibly spark a war between democracies. The simulation also included comparing politically pluralistic systems of governance with mature/immature and transitional democratic systems.

The conditions they describe which might nullify DPT are troubling and persuasive. The first category is “fighting over the past”, e.g., “old hatreds” in which states, though democratic, still seethe with anger, shame, or humiliation over past historical events. Relations between Turkey and Greece are usually strained because of their past unhappy interactions. Another category is “imperial legacies”. Russia’s recent border war with its former state, Georgia, in 2008, is a good example of this. Or, “messy divorces” conflicts which erupt over separatist pressures and questions of sovereignty, borders, territory (Bosnia, Kosovo, the Balkans, India-Pakistan). Other categories identified by the simulation included fighting over identity – ethnic, cultural religious. “Fighting over non-state actors”, e.g., (terrorist camps in neighboring democratic states; crime wars that cross border – sparking tensions between the US and Mexico). “Fighting over power” that is, tensions between authoritarian regimes and democratic states. Could future tensions with China lead not to war with China but fights between democratic states such as Taiwan, Philippines, or South Korea over concerns about a “re-militarized Japan”, especially if the US were to withdraw military assets from the region? Is there really no chance of global “policemen” clashing over their spheres of influence – witness the growing tensions between the US and an increasingly bellicose and nationalist Russia?

One especially compelling category about what future conflicts could take place between democratic states is “fighting over resources”. This may be the most troubling and worrisome category identified during the simulation. Most will agree that the 21st century will have to cope with unprecedented strains as it adjusts to climate change, mass migrations and humanitarian disasters, and the desires of more and more Third World states to modernize, create consumer based economies, and require massive new energy resources. Not to mention increases in population growth. It is hard not to imagine potential conflicts between democratic states over access and control to water resources in drought stricken regions – more than two hundred river basins are shared by states with nearly one half of the world’s population. Potential flash points include water rights in the Indus River Basin (Pakistan and India); the Tigris Euphrates river systems (Turkey, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Israel). Or, if drought conditions in the Southwestern US become more severe or aquifers become empty, the immediate question is which state, the US or Mexico, receives sufficient water and power resources from border rivers? Are “zero sums” calculations of national interest really that dormant if two democracies dispute an issue like this with one another?

Recently, there are cases of sharp tensions and anger over which states have access or permission to fully exploit seabed/exclusive economic zones. Any time the dispute is about energy sources there is potential for conflict. Certainly there is any number of scenarios in which claimants to the energy rich islands in the South China Sea could clash. If democratic Venezuela were to stop oil exports to the US, could its actions result in a armed hostilities? Another flash point will be the scramble by states, including democratic ones, to exploit the “Arctic Gold Rush” that is beginning. Yes, there is a Arctic Council, but with the melting of the ice caps, and the emerging potential to harvest and develop significant new mineral and energy resources, will even democratic states not be tempted to use force to achieve their economic rights in this region? Russia has in recent years been planting “flags” under the Arctic Ocean, most likely to stake out future claims for sovereignty if the melting of ice caps continues. Or, consider the precedent of the famous Cod War between the UK and Iceland; it is not out of the question that a similar series of clashed could take place between democratic states, in which a near miss may actually escalate into armed hostilities.[[3]](#footnote-4)

As a Wikistrat analyst warned, the six categories created by the simulation may be, “…a reminder that even democracies—mature or not—can find plenty of reasons to fight with one another in a world of increasing connectivity” (Prescott, 2012).

In recent years, there is a case of two democracies whose relationship has significantly deteriorated. The dispute over the ownership of the Falklands/Malvinas islands in the South Atlantic is becoming more tense and embittered. Both states are democracies (the UK is a mature democracy; Argentina is a more recent member of the democratic club of nations). Their claims flow from colonial resentments, lost territory, economic nationalism, pride/humiliation, the potential to exploit vast new natural resources around the islands, and the legacy of a short, but bloody war fought between the UK and the military junta of Argentina in 1982. Which is a better predictor of whether these two democracies will use force against each other again – DPT or some of the conditions outlined by critics of the democratic peace argument?

 ***Flashpoint: The UK vs. GOA – The Falklands/Malvinas Islands Dispute***

On March 15 2013, a referendum was held on the Falklands Islands. Over 1,500 adults, out of total populations of 3,000, participated in the vote. The question on the ballot was a simple one - did they wish to remain as British citizens in and maintain the status of islands as British territory. Their answer was an overwhelming vote in the affirmative. There would be no negotiations with Argentina over questions of sovereignty over the islands.

The reactions from the UK and Argentina, though predictable, illustrated the increasing belligerence and hostile rhetoric and actions that have clouded UK-GOA relations for over a decade, especially since 2007. In the aftermath of the referendum, British PM Cameron declared that the GOA should “revere and respect” the wishes of the islanders. He insisted that the UK would “always be there” to defend the Falkland Islands” (*The Express*, March 13, 2013). President Kirchner of the GOA “was immediately dismissive of the vote. She noted that “it’s as if a bunch of squatters were to vote on whether or not to keep occupying a building illegally” (*The Telegraph*, March 13, 2013). Kirchner described the voting results as a “parody” (*The Express*, March 14, 2013).

The historical relations between the two countries have been stormy. In 1765, Great Britain claimed sovereignty over the islands. In 1774 it evacuated its base but maintained its claim to the Falkland Islands. After the series of Bolivarian revolts against Spanish colonial rule, newly independent Argentina, in the spirit of new nationalism, claimed sovereignty over what it called the Malvinas Islands in 1820. However, in 1833, Great Britain returned and reestablished its ownership of the islands.

Though never pleased with the situation, peaceful relations between the two were maintained. Then, in 1965, the United Nations (UN) characterized the island dispute as a “colonial” problem, urging negotiations between the parties. Because of its veto power in the UN Security Council, no UN sponsored talks took place between the UK and GOA. However, in 1982, the GOA was a military dictatorship. Most likely motivated by a desire to placate domestic unrest and stoke up nationalism in support of the regime, and making the calculation that seizing the islands would be relatively easy, on April 2, 1982, Argentinean military forces overwhelmed the small force of British soldiers stationed on the islands, and reclaimed the Malvinas for Argentina. It was evident too that the military junta had assumed that no British government would retaliate in a significant way, let alone organize a military task force and retake the islands. However, the military leaders of Argentina had not reckoned that then British PM Margaret Thatcher would indeed counterattack. A combined army and naval expeditionary force was sent to the islands to reclaim them for the UK. After a series of naval, air and land battles, Argentinean forces surrendered to the British. Nearly 1,000 British and Argentinean combatants died in the conflict.

There were several key developments after the war. Pro-democracy forces in Argentina overthrew the military dictatorship. The UK significantly reinforced its military forces on the islands. In 1983, the British parliament granted the Falklanders full British citizenship rights. In 1985, a new constitution was written for the Falklands, making them a self governing entity, with foreign and defense policy set by London. Though now committed to democracy, the GOA and Argentinean public opinion were still bitter over the defeat in the Malvinas. It was not until 1989, that the UK and GOA began to restore its ties. While not conceding its claims to the Malvinas, the UK and GOA maintained generally cordial relations, agreeing to disagree peacefully. Indeed, in 1998 then Argentina’s President Menem visited the UK and while reaffirming his claim to the islands, promised that only peaceful measures would be used to pursue the question. In 2001 British PM Tony Blair visited Argentina for a round of trade talks. In short, the dispute had become a “frozen conflict.” This is what DPT would predict. Ways would be found to avoid war and settle their differences via negotiations and diplomacy.

However, two objective events changed the equation. Beginning in 2003, a new political dynasty began, the era of the Kirchners. Both Nestor Kirchner and after his death, his wife Cristina, became the elected presidents of Argentina. The other was the discovery of significant oil reserves around the disputed islands. From the beginning of their terms, Nestor Kirchner and his wife, the current president of Argentina sought to whip up nationalist resentments over UK sovereignty over the islands. It also cannot escape notice that once it was determined that a potential of 60 billion barrels of oil and gas reserves might be exploited around the islands, and the beginning of oil exploration by British companies, more and more harsh and vituperative rhetoric began to be hurled against the UK over its “outrageous” occupation of the Malvinas With the emergence of new political leaders in Argentina who were using cries of “Malvinas for Argentina” in order to solidify their domestic base of support within Argentina, and their desire to share in the oil and natural resources “bonanza” around the islands , a significant and real increase in hostile words and actions against the UK began to be initiated. The stakes were changing. The Falklands was not just an island filled with sheep and a few British settlers; it was a potential source of petro dollars for that state that owned it. Moreover, the UK has also dug in its heels now to defend its territorial control over the Falklands islands.

With a nationalist and at times equally provocative British PM, David Cameron, the UK and GOA began to break down the “frozen” nature of the dispute. The below chronology outlines the escalation in hostile words and actions between the UK and GOA since the discovery of the oil reserves around the islands:

2007 Argentina rejects an invitation for UK and the GOA to jointly commemorate the war in UK.

2009 UK rejects requests by Argentina to begin talks about the future sovereignty of the islands

2010 UK oil firms begin drilling for oil around the islands.

Feb. 2010 The GOA launches an international diplomatic offensive in support of its claims to the islands. Cristina Kirchner receives the backing of 32 Latin American and Caribbean states to support its demand that the UN intervene in the dispute. An Argentinean warship sails over ten miles into the oil zone around the islands; HMS York orders vessel to change course.

March 2010 President Kirchner declares that the battle is going to be eternal but it is not going to be like the past, “with force” (Dempsey, 2010).

May 2010 The GOA announces that four new navy patrol vessels were under construction and would be sent into the region to demonstrate its willingness to exercise sovereignty over the islands (Dempsey, 2010).

June 2010 The GOA announces that it is seriously considering adding nuclear powered vessels into its navy (Dempsey, 2010).

Sept. 2010 In an act of solidarity with Argentina, Uruguay prevents HMS Gloucester from docking in Montevideo. The GOA announces a 50% increase in its defense budget (Dempsey, 2010).

Jan. 2011 HMS Clyde prevented from docking in Rio de Janiero in Brazil.

April 2011 President Kirchner orders that all schools in Argentina have a classroom named after a soldier killed in the 1982 war.

June 2011 President Kirchner launches bitter personal attack against PM Cameron. In a televised speech across Argentina, she calls him “stupid” and “arrogant.” Moreover, “We are going to continue without rest claiming not only sovereignty but also that they sit at the table to negotiate as the UN resolutions calls for. We are going to do it in each and every forum. We are going to say that in the 21st century they are still a crude colonial power in decline” (*The Express*, June 18, 2011

Oct. 2011 UK defense ministers pledges that islands will be defended from attack by the GOA. “But one thing is unchanged; for as long as the people of the Falklands choose to, they are, and always will be, British” (*Defence Web*, October 6, 2011).

Dec. 2011 The GOA begins a campaign of economic blockade and harassment of the islands and attempts to isolate it. 12 Spanish fishing vessels are boarded by Argentinean naval craft and charged with operating illegally with fishing licenses illegally issued by the Falklands. More South American allies ban ports of call visits from ships waving Falkland flags. On the 22nd, Kirchner, the newly re-elected president of Argentina, tells Mercosur supporters that by backing GOA claims”…you are also doing it in your own defenses. Malvinas is not an Argentine cause it is a global issue because in the Malvinas they are taking our oil and fishing resources” (*Times*, December 22, 2011). A British former head of the Royal Navy argues that the UK should flex its nuclear muscle more to fend off Argentine aggression. “I think when we have a nuclear submarine around the island as we often do, maybe it should its mast up and show it’s there occasionally” (*The Express*, December 22, 2011).

Jan. 2012 PM Cameron accused Argentina of “colonialism” because of its economic blockade of the islands. A UK national security council meets to insure that “our defenses and everything else are in order.” Another purpose of the meeting “is to discuss that issue (Falklands), is to make sure nobody is in any doubt” about British support for the right of Falklanders to exercise their right of self-determination. The GOA responds that the UK is “synonymous for colonialism” (*The Guardian*, January 19, 2012). In a show of force and deterrent signal, the UK deploys the advanced warship HMS Dauntless with missile capabilities that could “take out all of South America’s fighter aircraft let alone Argentina’s.”

Feb. 2012 President Kirchner declares she will lodge a formal complaint to the UN about the UKs increasing “militarization” of the region around the islands. Prince William of the British Royal Family begins a tour of duty on the islands as a helicopter pilot; the GOA calls him a “conquistador” (*The Telegraph*, February 11, 2012). UK states that GOA claims about submarine missiles being deployed are “absurd” (*Washington Times*, February 13, 2012). The GOA defense minister proclaims that Argentina will defend itself from any UK “invasion” (*The Express* February 9, 2012).

March 2012 The UK accuses the GOA of “policy confrontation” after it threatens to blockade British imports. The GOA accuses UK of escalating tensions by sending Trident nuclear missiles to the region in submarines. Argentina prevents two cruise ships from masking ports of call after they first visit the Falkland’s. (Daily Telegraph March 1, 2012). Peru denies port of call rights to HMS Montrose in solidarity with Argentina (*Times*, March 21, 2012)

April 2012 The GOA threatens London based banks that are connected with British oil companies drilling in the region with criminal and civil legal actions. (*The Sunday Telegraph*, April 1, 2012). On the 30th anniversary of the war, President Kirchner addresses Argentinean veterans of the war. In UK remembrance ceremonies are conducted (*Gold Coast Bulletin*, April 3, 2012).

June 2012 PM Cameron and President Kirchner personally clash at a G20 summit. During the summit, Kirchner attempted to force Cameron to accept a package of UN resolutions about the dispute. Cameron refuses her package, warning her to respect the self determination wishes of the islanders. The GOA foreign minister states that the “UK is the most colonialist country in the world not Argentina” (*Daily Telegraph*, June 20, 2012). On the 15th Cameron during a speech warns against GOA aggression. There would be “absolutely no negotiation” about the sovereignty of the islands. Indeed, the islands would hold a referendum about their wishes in 2013(defense web, June 15th 2012), Kirchner then delivers an emotional speech at the UN Decolonization Committee asking, “How can it (the Malvinas) be part of British territory when it is 14,000 miles away? (*Defence Web*, June 15, 2012).

July 2012 President Kirchner decides not to attend the opening ceremonies of the London Olympic Games, in diplomatic snub to UK (*Belfast Telegraph Online*, July 25, 2012).

August 2012 The GOA accuses a “hostile” UK of encourage vandalism against shrines for Argentinean war dead on the islands in acts of “sacrilege” (Western Daily Press, August 2, 2012).

Dec. 2012 The GOA protests over plans to rename part of disputed territory Antarctic after Queen Elizabeth as part of her “jubilee” celebration; they describe these efforts as a “systematic attack” and provocation by UK over the Malvinas (*Times*, December 20, 2012).

Jan. 2013 On Jan. 3 President Kirchner published in UK newspaper The Guardian an “advert” addressed to PM Cameron about the island dispute. Kirchner charges that over 180 years ago, “in a blatant exercise of 19th century colonialism, Argentina was forcibly stripped of the Malvinas Islands” and demands that the UK submit to UN resolutions and forums for negotiations. The UK Foreign Office “strenuously” denies the GOA charges, reiterating that the people of the islands have the right to exercise their self determination and remain British citizens *(Daily Telegraph*, January 13, 2013). On Jan. 5th it is reported that the UK complains to the GOA Ambassador about “increasing aggressive actions against the people of the Falkland Islands”: the UK cites an attack by masked men who tore apart a shipping services company in Buenos Aires. It is alleged that the attack was made to deter vessels from visiting the Falklands as plan to harass the British tourist cruise industry (*Washington Post*, January 5, 2013). The UK protests a pattern of intimidation when flag burning crowds subjected hundred of British tourists to verbal abuse in Buenos Aires and not allowed to leave their cruise ship (*The Daily Telegraph*, January 5, 2013). PM Cameron, asked about the tensions and whether the UK would fight to keep the Falklands states, “of course we would…we have strong defenses in place on the Falkland islands. That is absolutely key…we have fast jets stationed there we have troops stationed on the Falkland’s….we still have one of the top five defense budgets in the world” *(Daily* *Mail*, January 7, 2013). The GOA responds to PM Cameron “the aggressiveness of the PMs words support the complaint made to the UN by Argentina about (UKs) militarization of the South Atlantic and the possible introduction of nuclear arms by the colonial power” (*The Telegraph*, January 7, 2013). On Jan. 14th it is reported that UK defense officials have drawn up contingency plans for sending military reinforcement to the Falklands and ways to respond to Argentinean actions after the expected yes vote by Falklanders during the 30th anniversary referendum. UK officials worry about possible “stunts” such as a small party of Argentineans landing on the island and planting their flag, or a “Cod War” style of continued economic harassment by the Argentinean navy against the fishing and oil industries of the islands. The commander of British forces on the islands proclaims that “deterring aggression is my priority but I am fully confident that I have the capability to defend the island” (The Telegraph, January 14, 2013).

Feb. 2013 The GOA foreign minister predicts Argentina will gain control of the islands within 20 years (*Independent*, February 6, 2013).The GOA Ambassador pulls out of talks with UK in London when it was noted that a delegation of Falklanders would be included. The ambassador described the islanders as “colonists from Malvinas” with illegal status (*Independent*, February 1, 2013). On Feb. 10, the UK labels the GOA claim to the islands as a “fantasy.” “Britain is a country which supports the right of people to determine their own future. There should never be a reward for bullying or threatening behavior in international affairs” (*The Sun*, February 10, 2013). On Feb. 24th, it is reported that the GOA is developing new missile technology with the capability of striking the Falkland Islands. Experts describe missile programs as “potential threat” to the Falklands. Their conclusion? “Only logical reason to develop such technology was to threaten the Falklands” (*The Sunday Times*, February 24, 2013).

March 2013 President Kirchner demands that UK sit down with the GOA and negotiate. “Argentina once more demands that the UK…sit down for talks over sovereignty” She wants sovereignty, through peaceful means (*The Daily* *Telegraph*, March 2, 2013). First results of referendum released; 92% turnout of eligible voters; 99.8% vote yes to stay as part of the UK. Kirchner states “It’s as if a bunch of squatters were to vote on whether or not to keep occupying a building illegally.” But she wants to “reiterate our commitment to Malvinas, to dialogue, our compliance with UN resolutions” (*The Telegraph*, March 13, 2013). Then, on March 17th, British PM criticizes the new pope from Argentina over his earlier claims that the UK were “usurpers” in regards to the islands dispute (*Sunday Mail,* March 17, 2013). Kirchner then seeks help from Francis I to intervene on Argentina’s behalf.

As of this writing, this is how the situation stands in the aftermath of the 30th anniversary referendum vote regarding the sovereignty and self determination of the Falklands/Malvinas islands. Applying insights from DPT literature and critics of the theory to this case study, a key question will now be addressed. How likely is it that in the months or years ahead an armed clash will take place between two democracies over this bitter issue?

***Conclusions***

The case study of current UK and GOA relations clearly describes a pattern of hostile rhetoric and actions that is precluding even discussions between these two democracies, about the islands dispute. Issues of historical grievance “legacies of empire”, national pride, and territorial sovereignty have created a toxic relationship between the UK and GO. Both are democracies; both use very provocative language against one another. Both sides regularly indulge in the use of hurling personal insults and invective against the leaders of the opposing side. Indeed, Argentine President Kirchner and British Prime Minister (PM) Cameron seem to go out of their way to taunt each other and personalize the dispute. As of today, both state’s positions are locked in. There is no hint of compromise or real negotiations. And, physical actions ranging from the GOA’s campaign of economic blockade and harassment against UK assets and citizens and a buildup of UK military forces as deterrent signals against an Argentinean military attack do not bode well for an amicable settlement of this issue.

DPT predicts that for all of their differences, neither side will wage war against one another. They are habituated to peace now. As noted earlier, supporters of DPT have cited historical statistical surveys to back their assertions. One key problem, though, as any undergraduate student in the social sciences at least would know, is that statistical correlations do not mean causation. Other variables or forces may account for peace between democratic states.

Several categories from the Wikistrat simulation are certainly applicable in this case. And it is not reassuring for the long run. The GOA and UK are fighting over the past and imperial legacies. There is a high degree of nationalism and emotionalism at stake for the parties. Another relevant category is the one about states fighting over resources. With major oil and gas and fishing resources available on or near the islands, there are definite reasons for the UK and GOA to engage in rounds of economic nationalism. It is probably not a coincidence that the breakdown in UK-GOA relations escalated around 2007; the period in which mineral and energy resources were discovered near the islands and began to be developed by British oil companies. We should not underestimate the power of wealth seeking to ignite conflicts, e.g., the era of mercantilism and wars between nation states (albeit exhibiting varying degrees of representative government) during the 17th through 18th centuries.

Another potential weakness of DPT is that it focuses primarily on the nation-state as variable and primary actor. What is lacking is a deep analysis of the psychology of decision-makers and political leaders in cases wherein they consider the use of force against other states. David Welch and others were quite right to point out the power of emotional mind-sets, of leaders and groups, in creating outcomes either for peace, or for war (Welch 2003). Presently, the Argentinean president and political establishment harbors deep grievances and anger against the UK; their anger and emotions have been matched by PM Cameron and much of the British political establishment. And, public opinion in both Argentina and UK are quite nationalistic and firm, in defending their government’s policies regarding the disputed islands.

It is possible that a more calm and reasonable Argentinean head of state could take power, or a less aggressive British PM could take office and place negotiations at the heart of their attempts to peacefully settle the conflict. For example, in the spirit of DPT, new leaders could agree to share new oil and gas receipts in the future. Or, create diplomatically new forms of power sharing between the parties on the islands.

However, what is the most persuasive reason that a war will not take place soon (barring an incident or miscalculation by political leaders) are facts on the ground on the islands. And those facts are military. At the moment the UK, in contrast to 1982, has based a developed a significant military deterrent on the islands. They have based a squadron of state of the art Typhoon strike fighters on the Falklands. Hercules transport planes and tankers are available. There are several Rapier missile batteries that could take down attacking Argentinean aircraft. 1200 British military personnel are based on the islands. Royal Navy assets, with regular rotation of advanced frigates and destroyers into and out of the islands, insure British surface naval supremacy. Most significantly, like 1982, a British nuclear attack submarine could quickly be deployed in the waters around the islands and render once again the surface fleet of Argentina impotent. Granted, there are no Harrier aircraft carriers in the Royal Navy that could provide close air support for an invasion force as during the 1982 campaign. Because of budget cuts in the UK, aircraft carriers are not available to respond to a fresh Argentinean invasion of the islands.

As long as this deterrent force is maintained, the GOA is simply not capable of launching a successful attack on the islands. British armed forces, and the threat to use them, not DPT, is the key to maintaining the peace in the South Atlantic. Still, it is not difficult to imagine a future scenario in which the UK and GOA could go to war against each other. Right now, the Conservative government in UK has been strengthening its military assets on the islands; however, if in the future, it is decided, perhaps by another government, to reduce defense expenditures and withdraw military forces from the islands, this action would almost invite a new Argentinean invasion. The legacy of imperialism, territorial grievance, nationalism, pride would be too much for a government of GOA to resist. If the balance of military power were to shift in the South Atlantic, there likely would be another war. Realism and balance of power considerations, not DPT, would be the best explanation for another war, even if the parties are both democracies

DPT is still a strong theory. For many reasons, most democracies have not waged war against other democracies. But is the theory full proof? Will it prevent future clashes between democracies within an essentially non-ideological century? More critical analysis of DPT needs to be conducted. As Bingham, in general a supporter of DPT put it, “The democratic peace theory cannot be viewed as a template for guiding political action; simply because two states are liberal democracies by no means rules out the possibility of war between them” (Bingham, 2012).

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1. In this same article, Russett reflects about Thucydides, quoting the following “In the end, Thucydides pliant about Athenians regret over the war with Syracusans, ‘of the same type as their own, democracies like themselves’, evokes a tragedy of norms as well as matter.” (Russett 1992, p. 430). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. As shown in the bibliography of this paper, Russett and other colleagues of his published a significant amount of work supporting the assumptions of DPT. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Explaining the “near miss” of the Cod Wars has been a challenge for supporters of DPT to explain away. John Baden, Chairman of the Foundation for Research and Environment, describes a key paradox. Some disputes between democratic states such as UK and Iceland have indeed escalated into violence and the use of naval gunfire. One of the reasons for this flashpoint is that fishing crosses across borders. “The exception that makes even established democracies take up arms against one another is fish.” In other words “too many fisherman chase two few fish…if we can’t manage the diplomacy of fish, how can we manage nukes, human rights, or terrorism?” “Do Democracies Fight Each Other?” BBC News (November 17, 2004). <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/magazine/4017305.stm>. Retrieved Online. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)