

**Dan Reiter and Allan C. Stam, *Democracies at War*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002. Pp. 328. \$19.95, paperback; \$55.00, hardcover.**

The theory of democratic victory is a recent development that is contained within the larger democratic peace literature (the absence of wars between democracies). Democratic victory refers to the propensity for democracies to win the wars they fight. This is an important empirical contribution to the fields of political science and military strategy. It is also an apparent contradiction in military thought—leaders such as General Sherman, Lincoln, and Kennedy doubted the ability of democracies to wage war. In this book, Reiter and Stam explain what the democratic victory proposition is, establish its empirical accuracy, and suggest theories that would explain the empirical finding.

War outcomes have been a relatively understudied aspect in the field of international relations. Scholars routinely focus on the causes of war rather than on their outcomes and consequences, even though examining how wars end may lead to important discoveries of why they start in the first place. A comprehensive theory of democratic victory has the potential to help spur discoveries about the general causes of war and may lead to important theoretical breakthroughs in the study of democratic peace.

The authors first show support for the empirical finding that serves as a basis for any democratic victory proposition. Of the wars they initiated, democratic states have won 14 and lost one, while dictatorships have won 21 and lost 14. Democracies are also relatively successful in wars in which they are targets of aggression. As targets, democracies have won 21 and lost seven; dictatorships have won 16 times and lost 31. These findings hold when statistically controlling for factors such as wealth, alliance ties, distance, terrain, strategy, and military-industrial capabilities.

To explain the democratic victory figure, Reiter and Stam propose a theory based on selection effects. Democratic leaders are vulnerable to the will of the people. This constraint leads them to avoid defeat in order to retain office and general political consent. Democracies then

“select” themselves into wars that they are reasonably sure they will win.

A theoretical explanation based on such selection effects, however, actually highlights only the absence of an explanation that solidly supports the democratic victory results. We need much more empirical evidence based on historical sources to truly evaluate the proposition.

The classic questions that remain are, what did leaders know and when did they know it? For the selection effects argument to work, it must be documented that democracies knew they were going to win the war they were about to fight. In the first place, when do states know in advance that they are going to fight a war? Most states do not get involved in a crisis with the objective of fighting a war, but rather to gain some stake or advance an issue. If that goal can be met without fighting a war, success is achieved. Then, when a state gets into a situation where it is about to fight a war, how does a leader know he/she will win? Do they go out and count the number of battleships and figure out which side has more? Predicting who will win in war is a complex issue. To hypothesize that leaders can make this calculation before fighting is a proposition that has yet to be supported because, with rare exceptions, all leaders think they have a chance to win the wars they enter into.

Although the selection effects argument is the foundation of Reiter and Stam's democratic victory theory, an alternative they also advocate is that democracies are more effective on the battlefield. “The second general answer to the puzzle is that democracies win wars because they are more effective at fighting wars once hostilities begin” (p. 11). They propose that morale, leadership, and individual initiative will help soldiers of democracies fight more effectively on the battlefield.

If that is true, it would mean that democracies do not need to calculate whether they are going to win a war because they are always going to be more effective and likely to win from the outset. Thus, there is no need to base a theory of democratic victory on a strategic selection process because it would be determined primarily by the make-up of democratic militaries, not democratic political systems and electoral incentives.

This part of the book (mainly Chapter 3) is the most successful, because it highlights an important area of future research for both military historians and strategists, i.e., what is it about democracies that make them more effective on the battlefield? The answer requires both more in-depth case studies and datasets.

The authors then evaluate the proposition that democracies win wars because of support from a democratic community of states, but they find

that alliances and support from like-minded states are inadequate explanations. A similar proposition is that democracies win the wars they fight because they are better at utilizing their economic capabilities, but it is also shown to be an inadequate explanation. Other chapters then build on earlier themes and discuss the consent required to wage war and how consent and military effectiveness decline over time in democratic systems.

Still, the fact that democracies win the wars they fight is an important empirical finding that should spur research by political scientists, sociologists, military historians, and military strategists. What is needed now is an adequate explanation of democratic victory, and there is much work to be done.

This volume shows that internal domestic political factors can influence external military effectiveness. It may not be important to know how much power a nation has, how much money it has for weapons, or which weapons are better, but only that the nation fighting is a democratic state. Overall, it is an important one that will lead scholars to investigate the outcomes of wars and the internal domestic factors that can influence the ability of a state to win or lose in a violent struggle.

Brandon Valeriano  
Vanderbilt University

**Peter Maguire, *Law and War: An American Story*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2000. Pp. 446. \$30.00, hardcover.**

The post-Cold War prominence of war crimes tribunals—epitomized by the ongoing trial in The Hague of former Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic—make Peter Maguire's exposition of the Allied war crimes trials of German leaders following World War II especially timely. His account fills a gap in the historiographic literature concerning war crimes trials and raises critical questions regarding the context necessary for such trials to meet their political objectives. It should help guide U.S. foreign policy decision-makers fashion the strategic aims of war crimes trials in the twenty-first century.

The author's interest in the topic arises both from the personal and the political. He is the great-grandson of Robert Maguire, who served as a judge of a war crimes trial in 1948, and his childhood interest in his