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# THE PERILS OF DEMOCRATISM

**R. Sakwa**[1]

[1] *University of Kent. Canterbury, Great Britain*

**SAKWA, Richard,** Professor of Russian and European Politics, University of Kent, email: R.Sakwa@kent.ac.uk

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**Abstract.** The article examines an aspect of the meta-theoretical context of the renewed confrontation between the political West and Russia. A distinction is drawn between democratism, the purposive instrumentalization of democracy agendas in great power conflict, and democracy as a responsive, reflexive and participatory mechanism of popular control over government. In the post-Cold War era this gave rise to inter-democracy, the combination of NATO and the European Union as the basis for the continued predominance of Atlanticism in the political West. This served to exclude alternative security arrangements in post-Cold War Europe, notably pan-continental variants. At the same time, the political West, a constellation of power that was created during and shaped by the Cold War, advanced transdemocracy, the view that democracy was the foundation for the creation of a genuine security community. Drawing on democratic peace theory, this approach substituted democratic internationalism for the sovereign internationalism at the heart of the UN-based Charter international system established in 1945. This gave rise to a distinctive style of international politics, described as democratism in this paper. Rather than overcoming conflict, democratism serves to sharpen antagonisms and thus helped to regenerate Cold War practices and undermined the credibility of liberal internationalism itself. The blowback effects, however, should be distinguished from the continuing struggle for democracy and a style of international politics that remains true to Charter principles.

**Keywords:** democratism, democracy, inter-democracy, transdemocracy, democratic peace, political West, Charter international system, international politics.



*'Convictions are more dangerous enemies of truth than lies.'*
Friedrich Nietzsche, Human, All-Too-Human

The Ukraine crisis is the biggest challenge to world peace of our age, yet it is remarkable how little theoretical analysis there has been about what created the situation. Even more remarkable is the near total absence of a substantive language in which to describe the processes that have come together to spark off this confrontation between the great powers. Already in the early stages, following the change of regime in Ukraine in 2014 and Russia's annexation of Crimea, followed by the autonomist in surgency in the Donbass, the conflict was compared to 1914, when the European nations 'sleep-walked' into war [Clark 2013].[1] The 2015 House of Lords report into Russian-European Union (EU) relations used this word three times, arguing that the West had inadvertently slipped into the Ukrainian imbroglio[2]. The Great War was fundamentally about contending great power ambitions, with a general consensus that

[1] It should be noted that quite a few actors were wide awake when they took the decision to go to war, notably in the German High Command and in France.

[2] House of Lords, The EU and Russia: Before and Beyond the Crisis in Ukraine, European Union Committee, 6th Report of Session 2014-15, 20 February 2015.

Germany's rising power came into contention with Great Britain's attempt to maintain the status quo as the regional hegemon. Today, this classic neorealist analysis can be applied with equal force, but it is tempered by various normative considerations as well as by broader interpretations of the structure of international politics. There is an urgent need to clarify not only the motivations of the various actors but also the underlying structures of thought that brought the world once again into a situation pregnant with World War III. This paper focuses on just one aspect of the required analysis, the role played by values in current great power contestation.

## DEMOCRATISM

Democratism is not the same as the enduring struggle for democracy. The idea of democracy is constantly evolving but today has lost some of its emancipatory potential because of its instrumental application in great power conflicts and in the management of relations with subaltern powers. The ideological contest between capitalism and socialism characteristic of Cold War I has given way to the priority of the struggle for democracy in international politics. At issue is liberal democracy, tempered to varying degrees by social democratic principles, which dismisses the democratic claims of alternative models of political representation and participation. Liberal democracy prioritises constitutional governance, free and fair elections, the rule of law and defensible property rights. This gives rise to responsible government, accountability to citizens through competitive elections (of some sort or other), the independence of the courts and the maintenance of human dignity through adequate social welfare and other social rights. By contrast, democratism is the subordination of democracy to geopolitical concerns. It does not preclude support for democracy, but too often democracy promotion and support for indigenous democracy advocacy groups become part of broader regime change agendas. When democracy becomes an ideology and an instrument in great power competition, then it becomes democratism.



The instrumentalization of democracy not only undermines diplomacy but works to delegitimate democracy itself. Democratism inevitably gives rise to double standards, the selective applications of ostensibly universal principles to favour allies while inflicting punitive measures on adversaries. It also imposes a rank order on states and serves to delegitimate some while elevating others. This value dimension is far from new, and international politics remains torn between neoclassical realists (neorealists), who focus on interests and the value-neutral pursuit of national goals, and classical realists and idealists, including some ideologues of various stripes, who insist that values (whether cast earlier in religious terms or today in the language of human rights) are an important element in the pursuit of national interests. The Peace of Westphalia in 1648 marked the first major step in formalising the separation between values and interests, although the distinction remains blurred and far from precise.

In our era the intermeshing of security and normative concerns in a world that remains competitive gives rises to two processes. The first is what Glenn Diesen calls 'inter-democracy', the interaction of the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation in a mutually reinforcing power system [Diesen 2015]. The breakdown of this order in 2014 brought NATO back into the centre of the European security architecture. Already the EU deferred to NATO on security matters, disappointing the aspirations of a diminishing band of Gaullists who favoured the Europeanisation of political and security development to create what is conventionally called a Euro-Atlantic security system. Instead, after 1989 traditional Atlanticism re-asserted its priority and stifled Gaullist aspirations for separate although linked European

and US security pillars. Despite the end of Cold War I, this gave birth to a 'new Atlanticism', envisaging a permanent US-led Atlantic partnership [Sakwa 2015]. The consolidation of Atlanticism has been far from monolithic, encountering resistance in the form of residual leftist anti-militarism, traditional conservative demonstrative (as opposed to missionary) internationalism, Trumpian mercantilism and America firstism, aspirations for European 'strategic autonomy' and various national populist counter-movements. The abandonment of plans to create a Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), dubbed an 'economic NATO', indicated the limits of Atlanticism. The negotiations were conducted largely in secret, and threatened to undermine social and environmental standards in the EU while deepening the gulf between Atlantic and continental visions of Europe. The backlash against the deindustrialisation of the American heartlands in the era of globalisation gave rise to inchoate yet persistent anti-globalist sentiments.

The various crises of recent years tempered the drive towards the consolidation of Atlanticism, but Russia's 'special military operation' in Ukraine from February 2022 stifled aspirations for a revived Euro-Atlanticism, if not a fully-fledged separate Western European security identity. Concerns about the reliability of Washington as an ally subsist, fostered by a persistent strain of Trumpism in American political discourse, but Atlanticism remains the hegemonic discourse in security matters. What was 'new' about inter-democratic post-Cold War new Atlanticism is not that it achieved its stated goals of all member countries spending a minimum of two per cent of GDP on defence (although that goal was boosted by the Ukraine war) and similar aspirations, but that it provided the framework for the debate over European security and political issues to the exclusion of other possible alternatives. The Atlantic system ensured American predominance in Western Europe as the price to pay to keep the Soviet threat at bay, but after 1989 other possibilities were stymied.



European ideational monism was reinforced by the strengthening of the Atlantic security community. Despite promises at the time of German unification in 1990 that NATO would not enlarge beyond the former GDR, expansion saw membership rise from 16 at the end of the Cold War to 30 by 2022.[3] In this system there was 'no place for Russia' [Hill 2018]. Dialogue and engagement gave way to the assertion of axiological principles by the inter-democratic Atlantic community. After 2014 all sides understood that attempts to create a transformed cooperative European security community had failed, and that a new era of confrontation had dawned. The 25 years' crisis of the cold peace gave way to a new division of Europe, with the Atlantic community ranged against Russia. The consolidation of bloc politics was briefly undermined by the Donald J. Trump administration's concern with the rise of China. His rhetoric in favour of improving relations with Russia, accompanied potentially by attempts to make Russia a constitutive part of a reshaped Euro-Atlantic security order, were stymied by the Russiagate scandal [Sakwa 2022]. Instead, Russia has become a founding member of the political East, advancing the idea of a Greater Eurasian Partnership, although it remains an intrinsic part of European culture and an ambivalent protagonist in the quest that is European civilisation.[4]

The second process is 'transdemocracy', which describes the pre-Westphalian elision between security and systemic issues. In the European context, the transdemocratic claim is that security can be advanced by promoting liberal democracy and integration

[3] On enlargement, see [Sarotte 2022; Itzkowitz Shifrinson 2016].

[4] These themes are explored in my 'The Political West and Greater Eurasia', in the special issue 'The Eurasian Landmass and Great Power Competition' of The Zambakari Advisory, forthcoming.

into European institutions. On the global level, this means that the security of the political West is best advanced by creating a system of states moulded in the western image and committed to democratic internationalism, the ideological foundation of contemporary American power. The notion of transdemocracy, even though not given that label, has a genealogy that in the modern era begins with Immanuel Kant's article of 1795 'Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch', in which he argued that the republican form of governance tends to be more pacific than monarchies and empires. Unlike his modern epigones, Kant did not argue that the desired outcome should be facilitated by what is today termed regime change, arguing that 'No state shall forcibly interfere in the constitution and government of another state' [Kant 1991: 96].

Kantian universalism lies at the root of the post-Cold War order. The anti-communist revolutions of 1989-1991 were neo-Kantian in spirit and intent. The so-called 'third basket' of the Helsinki Final Act of August 1975 provided the framework for human rights to become the foundational discourse of the struggle against communist authoritarianism. Human rights became, in the words of Samuel Moyn, 'the last utopia', displacing social and economic rights as well as the principle of sovereign internationalism, the hitherto inviolable foundation of the Charter international system created in 1945.[5] In the absence of a post-Cold War peace conference, Helsinki formulations became the keystone in the arch of the 'new world order' in which human rights take precedence over social or other rights. This was given official form in the 'Paris Charter' of November 1990 for a 'Europe whole and free'.[6] The Paris Charter acted as the surrogate peace treaty in the absence of a negotiated post-Cold War settlement.

Kantian speculations on perpetual peace gave rise to an extensive literature on the 'democratic peace', the view that democratic states do not go to war with each other.[7] Democratic peace theory has been subjected to withering critique, above all because of the fluidity of definitions of what constitutes a democratic state [Rosato 2003]. Germany in 1914 was in certain respects more democratic (in terms of the breadth of the franchise and scope of social security) than many of the Allied states. Advocates of post-Cold War democracy promotion insist that 'if Russia had become democratic, the world would look very different now'.[8] The argument that democracy and peace are in some way connected is convincingly deconstructed by Kenneth Waltz, who notes that liberals have long sought 'to take the politics out of politics', leaving the state with not much more than managerial functions. Liberal internationalists assume that 'the spread of democracy will negate the effects of anarchy' [Waltz 2000: 8]. He insists that 'The structure of international politics is not transformed by changes internal to states, however widespread the changes may be' (this is a fundamental theme of [Mearsheimer 2014], see also [Waltz 2000: 10]). Waltz notes that undemocratic states are considered bad not so much because of what they do, but because of what they are; hence 'Democracies promote war because they at times decide that the way to preserve peace is to defeat nondemocratic states and make them democratic'. With undemocratic states considered a danger to others, 'Liberal interventionism is again on the march' [Waltz 2000: 11].



[5] For a broad analysis, see [Moyn 2012].

[6] Charter of Paris for a New Europe (Paris, CSCE, 1990). https://www.oscepa.org/documents/all-documents/documents-1/historical-documents-1/673-1990-charter-of-paris-for-a-new-europe/file (accessed 31.01.2023).

[7] For a review of the question, see [Doyle 1997; Liberal Peace... 2012].

[8] Volkov D. Marc Plattner: "If Russia had become democratic, the world would look very different now".

## Democratism and post-Cold War security

Democratism describes the intermeshing of security and democratic concerns in a world of competitive international politics. John Gray long warned of the danger of utopian visionaries in power, whether in the communist or democratising guise [Gray 2008]. The notion of democratism has a long pedigree, even though typically not characterised in this manner. In the nineteenth century Kant's republicanism was given a democratic inflection. As the editors of Giuseppe Mazzini's works note, 'Mazzini also crucially believed that the moral progress achieved through the establishment of independent, democratic governments at the domestic level would greatly facilitate the emergence of a more peaceful international order'. They take issue with E. H. Carr's interpretation of Mazzini's thinking in his *The Twenty Years' Crisis* that 'the spread of a popular government and national self-determination would result in a natural "harmony of interests" among democracies' [Carr 2001: 45]. Instead they argue that while an idealist, Mazzini was not politically naïve. 'For Mazzini there was little doubt that democratically-governed nation-states would continue to have many different and often outright conflicting interests. However, he anticipated that established constitutional democracies would be able to resolve those differences in a nonviolent, cooperative manner' [Recchia, Urbinati 2009: 17]. This would indeed be the case if the operative mode in international politics remained sovereign internationalism, but democratic internationalism precisely subverts diplomacy and degrades the creativity of dialogue.

Implicit in Kant's and Mazzini's works was a transformative vision. If democratic states were more likely to resolve their disagreements peacefully, then it made sense to ensure that democracy triumphed everywhere. This was the logic underlying Woodrow Wilson's liberal internationalism. This was never entirely hegemonic, and the conservative realist tradition in American foreign policy challenged this postulate. For example, Jeane Kirkpatrick, who later served as the US ambassador to the UN under Ronald Reagan, enunciated the strategic and moral arguments in favour of America supporting authoritarian governments.[9] Patrick Buchanan, in many ways the ideological precursor of Trump's brand of mercantilist neo-isolationism, argued for what is now called an 'America first' strategy and a less value-laden ideologised foreign policy. By contrast, Thomas Ambrosio talks of America as a 'democratic black knight', acting in certain circumstances, especially when national security interests are deemed to require it, in support of democratization. This became prevalent in the post-Cold War era, when the need to support friendly anti-communist authoritarian regimes declined [Ambrosio 2015]. Given the primacy of national security interests, democracy-promotion becomes salient in intensely competitive environments [Boix 2011].

Modern Atlanticism was born with Wilson's attempt to bring America out of isolationism to shape the world in its own image. This active engagement in world affairs, including commitment against the Central European powers, culminated in America's active role in the Paris peace talks in 1919, where Wilson's '14 Points' shaped the post-war territorial order. The outcome was the Treaty of Versailles and the creation of the League of Nations. The failure to win Senate approval meant that the US did not become a member of the organisation, and America reverted to its traditional isolationist posture. This was the period of the 'twenty years' crisis', so



[9] Kirkpatrick J. Dictatorships and double standards. *Commentary*, 1 November 1979. https://www.commentarymagazine.com/article/dictatorships-double-standards/.

brilliantly dissected by Carr in his critique of the idealism of the period, which in his view prevented pragmatic and timely adaptations in the international system [Carr 2001]. Two representations of world order were also in contestation in the inter-war years, the pattern repeated in the quarter century of the cold peace between 1989 and 2014. In Europe, it was the EU rather than the League of Nations which combined normative aspirations with realist practices, stymieing both and generating a confusion that was labelled 'double standards' by its critics [Headley 2015].

A new phase of Atlanticism was forged during the Second World War to tie the US into the struggle against Nazi Germany. The meeting in August 1941 between Winston Churchill and Franklin Roosevelt led to the adoption of the Atlantic Charter enshrining eight 'common principles', all of which were fully in tune with the liberal universalism proclaimed by Wilson. Given that the US was not yet at war, there could be no substantive discussion of military cooperation. Hence the focus was on the transdemocratic agenda of security through systemic transformation and what is now called regime change. In the end, the Anglo-American alliance tipped the scales against the continental power of Germany. A series of conferences – in Teheran, Moscow, Yalta and Potsdam – sought, as Henry Kissinger puts in his study of world order, to 'define a concept of peace' [Kissinger 2014: 271]. Roosevelt vetoed any attempt to restore the traditional balance of power system or the restoration of empires. The Soviet Union, however, at Yalta forcefully imposed a power-based European international system and created its own separate bloc. The Atlantic community was formally institutionalised through the creation of NATO on 4 April 1949, and maintained its commitment to a European order based on legitimacy and the values of respect for international law and various humanitarian objectives.



Atlanticism is founded on principles that seek to move beyond classic balance of power and sphere of influence concepts to institutionalise Wilsonian idealism. The commitment to transdemocratic principles remained the cornerstone of Cold War Atlanticism, but was now tempered and constrained by the realities of the Yalta-Potsdam settlement. With the Soviet Union at the height of its military power and in occupation of most of central and Eastern Europe, Yalta was forced to recognise geopolitical and ideological pluralism in Europe. This 'pluralism' became coercive when applied to the lands in-between, with the 'percentages' agreement between Churchill and Stalin of October 1944 effectively dividing the continent into spheres of influence, provoking an understandable revulsion against the concept today. It was this order that was repudiated at the Malta meeting in December 1989, which placed the Helsinki 'third basket' values-laden agenda at the centre of the post-Cold War European order. Democracy and security became entwined, confusing the operative logic of the two. This was not a problem for most of the former Soviet bloc, as well as the early Russian post-communist leadership, which eagerly bought into the Atlantic system as a way of confirming their 'Europeanness'. For East Europeans this was also a way of achieving security against the former Eurasian hegemon, generating a dynamic that undermined the security of all.

The disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991 naturally led many in the political West to assume that its long-term containment of the Soviet Union had been responsible for what was interpreted by many as a victory of the West. This is hardly surprising, since not only had the opponent collapsed but even Russia, the continuer state to the Soviet Union, proclaimed its commitment to the very values that underpinned the Western alliance system. This certainly looked like victory, but it was precisely at this point that

the seeds were planted that would later vitiate the achievement.[10] The 'victory' discourse, while justified in certain respects, is based on a fundamental misinterpretation of what the last Soviet leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, and his associates had in mind when advancing the New Political Thinking. It was not a capitulation to 'Western' values let alone to the geopolitical pre-eminence of the political West, but an appeal to the founding values of the postwar Charter international system – from which both the US and the USSR ultimately drew for their normative legitimacy.[11] Instead, the dominance of the Western security order was consolidated on a selective and exclusive basis, and no new universal security system for Europe was created. An asymmetrical peace order became established, in which one side acted as if it was the victor, while the other refused to accept defeat.[12] This established the conditions for the cold peace, a mimetic cold war that was unable to understand the sources of its own existence [Sakwa 2013].

From the very beginning Russia chafed at the definition of the post-Cold War order as Atlanticist, which by definition excluded a continental dimension in which Russia would be a natural equal. Russia's concerns were echoed by a diminishing band of Gaullists in France and supporters of Ostpolitik in Germany. Russia's weakness in the 1990s allowed only impotent growls over Bosnia, Kosovo, NATO enlargement, the invasion of Iraq, ballistic missile defence, Libya and other issues. Only from the mid-2000s was Russia in a position to reinforce its complaints with action. At the same time, the Atlanticism of the Cold War era sought to redefine itself to face new challenges. Since it appeared that the problem of European security had been resolved, the NATO alliance went 'out of area to avoid going out of business', as expressed in the jargon of the time. Interventions in Afghanistan and Libya provided the alliance with a global role, but only intensified the growing contradictions in Europe itself. These were exacerbated by American plans to install a missile defence system in Poland and the Czech Republic, later revised to a phased system in Romania and Poland.



Post-Cold War Atlanticism entailed not only the continued existence of the NATO-centred security system but also its expansion deep into the former territory of its erstwhile enemy, and indeed right up to its borders. From the Russian perspective, when it came to matters of international politics the EU had been subsumed into the broader Atlantic system. On certain issues the EU retained its 'actorness', the ability to act independently, but on the larger matters of war and peace – issues which for Russia were particularly salient given the long record of foreign invasions – the EU appeared to be little more than an adjunct to US policy in the hierarchy of the political West. This perception was accentuated by the EU's wholehearted endorsement of the US sanctions regime imposed on Russia after its invasion of Ukraine, even to the detriment of the European economy and damage to its societies.

What for the Atlantic alliance was praised as 'bipartisan' solidarity and unity in the Ukraine crisis, notably in the imposition of sanctions, for Russia is perceived to be a type of subservience of the EU to American strategic concerns. In particular, Germany and Russia long enjoyed a type of 'special relationship', which saw a series of intense bilateral contacts as well as the deepest economic links between any EU country and Russia. After 2014 Germany's active lobbying for sanctions and the exertion of the

[10] For an American-centred and 'triumphalist' account of the Cold War and its end, see [Gaddis 2007]. For an earlier account, see [Gaddis 1998].

[11] I make the argument in my *The Lost Peace* (Yale University Press, forthcoming).

[12] Cf. [Dower 2000].

necessary disciplinary measures against some of the more recalcitrant EU members came as something of a shock to Moscow. It should not have done since modern Germany is a child of the Atlantic system. The country was rebuilt after the war with Marshall Aid, and its constitution reflects precisely the principles enunciated by the Atlantic Charter. The unification of Germany was achieved as part of the political West. Germany became the European anchor of the Atlantic system, while at the same time emerging as the new hegemon within the EU. In that context, earlier Russian hopes for some sort of Moscow-Berlin axis or a replay of the politics of Rapallo, briefly revived when they found themselves in common opposition to the Iraq war, dissipated.

From 2022 Germany positioned itself as the leader of a global *Zeitenwende* (turning point), the intensification of the struggle by the political West for hegemony[13]. The relationship between democratic and non-democratic states became the salient cleavage in international affairs. The binary division of the world into democracies and autocracies left little room for neutrality or traditional forms of non-alignment, and accelerated the drive to armed conflict. International relations liberals argue that autocracies fear democracy because of the threat it poses to the legitimacy of authoritarian regimes. This argument has been used to explain Russia's interventions in Ukraine since 2014. A thriving, democratic and independent Ukraine tied to the EU is presented as a threat to Putin's kleptocratic authoritarian regime. This is countered by the argument that as far as Moscow is concerned, security is the key. Moscow is tolerant of democracies on its periphery as long as Russia's security interests are respected[14]. The notable example is the popular movement that installed a democratic government in Armenia in 2018, with the new leadership insisting that it would retain the geopolitical orientations of the previous administration and hence did not lose Moscow's support. This follows the logic of sovereign internationalism, but the democratic internationalism of the political West makes democracy foundational. However, when tempered by geostrategic considerations, it becomes democratism.



## DEMOCRATISM AND INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

It goes without saying that the object of attack will be labelled undemocratic, as was the case with Wilhelmine Germany in 1914 or Russia today. In the Russian case the relationship between democracy and security is rather more ambivalent and complex than in 1914 Germany. In both, democracy was far from consolidated and became subordinate to nationalist regimes pursuing geopolitical goals that were couched in defensive terms. For Russia, this was not always the case. In the early post-communist years Russia accepted the logic of democratic internationalism, but this soon ran aground on the shoals of disappointed expectations. In putting an end to the Cold War Gorbachev, appealed not to the ideas and institutions of the political West, a security order that took shape during the Cold War and was designed to wage the ideological and military struggle against the Soviet Union and its ideas, but to the universal principles embedded in the UN Charter.

Gorbachev and his successors were far from envisaging a capitulation to the political West but instead appealed to the common endeavour to implement the model of impartial universalism devised at the end of the war. There was nothing

[13] Scholz O. The Global Zeitenwende: How to avoid a New Cold War in a multipolar era. *Foreign Affairs*, Jan./Feb. 2023. https://www.foreignaffairs.com/germany/olaf-scholz-global-zeitenwende-how-avoid-new-cold-war (accessed 31.01.2023).

[14] On this, see [Kazantsev, Lebedev, Medvedeva 2021].

fanciful about Russia joining the political West as an equal, and thus transforming it into a greater West. The negative peace of the Cold War years would have been transformed into the beginning of a positive peace order, where its members turned away from militarism to face the common challenges of sustainable development, climate change and environmental degradation. Instead, the political West claimed victory for itself, and the process of Russian alienation from the post-Cold War European security order began. The establishment of democracy in Russia would be a perilous business in the best of circumstances, but it was certainly not helped by the failure to create an indivisible and equitable European peace order. A more benign international environment may ultimately have allowed the deepening of democracy.

The post-Cold War 'transdemocratic' claim that security can be advanced by promoting liberal democracy and integration into Atlantic institutions inevitably provokes conflict when perceived to take the form of aspirations for 'regime change'. If a state resists the normative demands of the political West and seeks to retain its autonomy in the international system, then it is liable to become the target for regime change. This entails the substantive denigration of the political subjectivity, if not sovereignty, of the states at the receiving end of transdemocratic practices. Countries are tested on two features: systemic conformity with the values of the political West; and structural compatibility with the hard structures of the Euro-Atlantic security community. If the Versailles peace became known in Germany as *Das Diktat*, so too in post-communist Russia the failure to renegotiate the terms of the new order assumed a Versailles-like quality. As far as Russia was concerned, there was both too much and too little Helsinki. There was too much, because the human rights discourse became predominant, eclipsing what in the original Helsinki agreement had been basket one issues (indivisibility of security, confidence building and confirmation of post-1945 borders) and basket two issues (economic relations). There was also too little Helsinki, since the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe, in whose framework the Helsinki conference of August 1975 was held, failed to become the core of the security order for post-Cold War Europe. Instead, NATO enlarged and eclipsed all other security alternatives.



The tension between realist and idealist approaches to the conduct of international affairs was at the heart of Carr's analysis of the 'twenty years' crisis' in the two decades before 1939. During the war a new synthesis emerged in which Wilsonian idealism was given a severely practical grounding in the emerging dominant power constellation. The Atlantic Charter of August 1941 embedded democracy into the very heart of security concerns, and this was a core formulation of the Washington Treaty establishing NATO in 1949. However, during the Cold War the priority was to build anti-communist alliances, irrespective of the character of the regimes. This allowed many unsavoury characters to garner American support, as long as they trumpeted the appropriate anti-Soviet sentiments. This selective approach certainly did not disappear after the Cold War, but since 1989 it has become a more controversial aspect of Western policy. The Atlanticist tradition of interweaving security with normative issues continues to the present day. In the post-Cold War era questions of European security became enmeshed in systemic 'values' issues – the political character of the countries in question. Security and democracy combined to create transdemocracy, the view that security can best be achieving by ensuring that a regime is similar to one's own.

This does not mean that regime change is everywhere and at all times on the agenda, but there is a trend towards dealing with states not as they are but as they should be.

As Ken Jowitt perceptively noted, this rendered the United States not imperialist but 'absolutist', unable to extend what he defined as the domestic national characteristic of 'compromise and bargaining' to its international relations [Jowitt 1992]. It undermines the conventions of international diplomacy by ensuring that one side claims the normative high ground, thus reducing all systemically different interlocutors to some sort of pre-diplomatic swamp (unless of course they provide some sort of security, status or economic tributary goods of value to the dominant powers). In Russia's case, this meant undermining its political subjectivity and thereby provoked a range of defensive reactions that only intensified distrust. This also applies to relations between the EU and Russia. Sergei Prozorov demonstrates that the relationship was built not the basis of sovereign equality but on the tutelary principle of teacher and pupil [Prozorov 2016]. This provoked profound concerns about status, since post-communist Russia from the first, despite the social and economic tribulations of the 1990s, was in no mood to join the political West as a subaltern. Disappointed by its failure to achieve the anticipated status gains by affiliating with the West, Russia turned to creating its own forms of Eurasian integration [Krickovic 2021]. The reproduction of hierarchy is one of the salient characteristics of democratic internationalism, and hence is deeply resented by advocates of sovereign internationalism – the model of international politics that views all 193 members of the UN as normatively equal.

The fusion of values and interests is at the heart of the EU's diplomacy, with all of the ambiguities that inevitably emerge. From the perspective of the EU, the Council of Europe and other avowedly normative European institutions, this was only right and proper. This is a 'post-modern' politics that eschews recognition of great power characteristics, such as the balance of power and spheres of interest, and instead state sovereignty is relativised and contingent and borders become conditional. The classic postulate of non-interference in the internal affairs of states (however much it may have been breached in practice) becomes dependent on a variable drawn from the value rather than the interest repertoire. The goal was to create a zone of peace on the European continent based on the rule of law, human rights, competitive markets, free and fair elections, and liberal institutions in general [Cooper 1996]. A bundle of 'good governance' practices was advanced to the EU's neighbours as part of the EU's 'external governance' strategy. This was a powerful and attractive vision and transformed much of Eastern Europe. However, governance problems have not disappeared, and even within the EU a more traditional conceptualisation of international politics has returned. The post-modern character of international politics is accompanied by the paradoxical reversion to pre-Westphalian normative relations. The catastrophic Thirty Years' War, despite cross-cutting alliances and counter-alliances, pitted Catholics against and Protestants, and ended in 1648 in the Peace of Westphalia that removed values from interstate relations.



The EU's influence was the single greatest factor in averting what Jowitt feared would be a 'new world disorder' after the fall of communism. However, the tension between structural and systemic issues ultimately generated conflicts that provoked the 'disorder' that had long been anticipated. The EU's presumption that it was post-modern whereas Russia was mired in the toils of modernity based on traditional identities, fixed territory, and a regressive obsession with sovereignty, status and geopolitics, generated an ontology of conflict that vitiated repeated pledges of 'strategic partnership'. As Ian Klinke argues, the EU's presumed postmodern geopolitics remain trapped in a very modern temporality, a representation of time that valorises the present over the past [Klinke 2012]. Robert Cooper is right to note

that as long as 'East' and 'West' remain constituted as antinomies, then 'the best that could be achieved was a ceasefire and a stalemate. ... Only in the context of a wider vision can a permanent peace be assured' [Cooper 2003: 146]. Despite repeated pledges of 'strategic partnership', in the end Russia and the EU divorced after a testy relationship that lasted barely two decades [Romanova: 2016: 791].

The same applies to Russia's relationship with NATO. For a quarter of a century NATO sought to find a new role in the post-Cold War world while devising a formula to place the relationship with Russia on a stable new footing. This was the period when liberal institutionalism appeared to triumph, constraining the anarchy of a state-centred system through cooperative institutions. Even then, Waltz noted that even though the clouds had lifted a little in the last part of the twentieth century 'twenty-five years is a slight base on which to ground optimistic conclusions'. He conceded that realist theory tends to depreciate the importance of institutions, and the 'strange case' of NATO outliving its purpose seemed to confirm the criticism. However, this was mistaken, since it only confirmed the neorealist postulate that 'international institutions are shaped and limited by the states that found and sustain them and have little independent effect'. Specifically, 'Far from invalidating realist theory or casting doubt on it, the recent history of NATO illustrates the subordination of international institutions to national purposes' [Waltz 2000: 18]. This is true to a degree, but such a view collapses various levels of analysis, an issue to which we now turn.

### The international system and values

It is not so much overt great power ambitions which precipitate conflict as the collision between ordering principles of international politics. These are 'post-ideological', in the sense that we can no longer coherently talk about the clash between ordering principles of social life as the precipitators of inter-state and inter-order conflict.[15] Equally, despite the argument of Samuel Huntington, it is not the 'clash of civilisations' that lies at the base of the global conflicts, although civilisational elements are undoubtedly a factor in contemporary confrontations [Huntington 1993, 1996].



Instead, 'values' have become the symbolic and substantive driving force generating conflict between states, non-state actors and regional alliances. The concept of values is notoriously slippery and hard to define. From the 1950s the concept of 'political culture' sought to classify the mental framework of orientations towards politics, but it was precisely the imprecision of the term that provoked its fall into desuetude. Instead, the idea of 'trust' became prevalent and is used to structure the discussion of relations between the state and society and between social agents, as well between international actors.[16] However, the idea of trust is as amorphous as political culture, with as much predictive power. Equally, the idea of status in international affairs helps explain some of the underlying forces that generate great power conflict, but once again there is the enduring problem of identifying causality. Undoubtedly the search for status is a motivating factor in international politics, where the imposition of hierarchy and resistance to hegemony are enduring features. The concept includes psychological as well as material factors that shape behaviour, rendering some states more aggressive and amenable to risky actions in pursuit of status [Krickovic, Zhang Chang 2020; Krickovic, Weber 2018].

[15] For a stimulating discussion, see [Flockhart 2016].

[16] For a recent study, see [Hosking 2014].

Discussion of the role of values in international politics is far from new. Some three decades ago there was a vigorous debate about 'Asian values', suggesting that the model of modernisation in Asia could differ from that of the West. This was a variant of the 'multiple modernities' argument – positing that societies could be equally modern but in different ways.[17] The headlong rush of Asian modernisation, however, has made much of this debate redundant – Confucianism and other traditionalisms do not appear to have held back Chinese or South Korean development. There remains a residual 'Asian values' discourse, applied mostly by authoritarian leaders to justify various forms of repression. At the same time, the Western democracy measuring business is far from neutral, but too often represents the 'securitization of democracy' [Tsygankov 2015].

The international system established in 1945 remains the bedrock of international politics today. The UN Charter and the subsequent normative acts, above all the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Genocide Convention of 1948, as well as the ramified institutional development of some two dozen specialised agencies reinforces the UN as the ultimate source of legitimacy for military interventions, global sanctions and international law. The Charter system is also associated with a distinctive mode of conducting international affairs, namely sovereign internationalism. The sovereignty of the 193 member states is enshrined in Charter norms, but at the same time this is tempered by commitment to the internationalism provided by the UN as the supreme multilateral format for the conduct of international affairs. Since 1945 international politics has been conducted within the framework of the Charter international system, although the multilateralism that it generates is only one aspect of international affairs. There is no world government, and thus there is a permanent tension between Charter principles and the actual conduct of international politics. It is in the latter that states contend and putative 'world orders' are created.



Values do not exist in isolation but are tied to the norms of distinct world orders. Two main ones are currently in contention: the US-led liberal international order, which can be categorised as the 'political West'; and the nascent anti-hegemonic 'political East' alignment of Russia and China, as well as combinations such as the BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. They represent distinctive normative constellations in the international system. While both claim to defend what the English School calls the secondary institutions of international society, notably the UN system and the complex web of global economic, legal and political governance institutions that have developed since 1945, the anti-hegemonic constellation insists on the autonomy of these institutions, whereas the liberal international bloc, under whose aegis some but not all of these secondary institutions were established, assumes that these are effectively synonymous with that bloc. This does not mean that there are not tensions (for example, the US relationship with the UN), but to this day the Bretton Woods institutions and other elements of the US-led postwar international architecture are still weighted in favour of the political West.

The post-Western anti-hegemonic alignment does not dispute the importance of the values embedded in international society, and are thus ready to share elements of sovereignty along this vertical axis, but they refuse to accept the instrumental use of these self-same values when they are expressed on the horizontal axis in relations between these two putative orders. They certainly repudiate the view that these

[17] [Eisenstadt 2000], for an overview, see [Sakwa 2012].

values can be determinative of relations between states. From the anti-hegemonic perspective, relations between states and international society are rule-driven and normative. Inter-order (and even more so inter-state) relations in their view should be based more on interests than values. This can be expressed in terms of a tension between sovereign internationalism, the core of the UN-based Charter international system, and the democratic internationalism espoused with increasing rhetorical fervour since the end of the Cold War in 1989. The postmodern rejection of 'modernity' and modernisation theory has been replaced by a no less teleological idea of liberal democratic universalism.

The Atlantic power system (the core of the political West) asserts its values in relations with outsiders, as an expression of the identity of the societies that comprise this community. This does not mean that this identity is unchanging and uncontested. In the 2000s the plan to adopt a European constitution provoked much soul-searching over how to define the core values of the EU. The Poles and some other countries insisted that the Preamble include a reference to Europe's Christian heritage, while for others this was anathema; not because they opposed the Christian elements of Europe's identity, but because for them European integration was a secular enterprise. Nevertheless, the idea of Europe has itself become representative of a set of values that are contrasted with those of Eurasia. This is the essence of the 'Ukraine syndrome', where the 'European choice' is the new formulation of the slogan of 1989 of the 'return to Europe'. The abstract utopia of 'Europe' has become the new ideal replacing the former teleology of building a communist society, and it has equally strong depoliticising effects. The monist political practices of the European choice reinforce the monism of a certain type of contemporary Ukrainian nationalism [Sakwa 2017].



The debate over European identity is about the separation into 'us' and 'them'. Some of the older divisions have become redundant, notably the traditional language of class (this is not to suggest that class divisions have disappeared – far from it), but the forms of political conflict associated with what used to be called the class struggle have changed dramatically. The end of the Cold War put an end to the most obvious forms of organised struggle between capitalist democracies and the self-designated socialist systems, while generating new forms of societal conflict and contradictions [Streeck 2016]. The end of the Cold War also put an end to a whole cycle of emancipatory politics dating from the Enlightenment, and given substantive form during the French Revolution as the struggle for political emancipation of the self-willed citizen. Initially this took the form of the struggle for the liberation of the bourgeois citizen, and a form of republican citizenship still lies at the base of the French polity today. In other parts of the world the fight for universal citizenship and free and equal electoral rights is still not won. In contemporary language, this means that the struggle for democracy continues. However, when combined with geopolitics, the result is democratism – the pursuit of political interests in the guise of ethical norms.

## CONCLUSION

Democratism assumes that if democracy is the best possible form of government and the one that is liable to make allies of the states concerned, then all practicable measures should be employed to achieve the desired end. Democratism is as distinct from democracy as waging war to put an end to war is from pacifism. Just as Napoleon exported the Enlightenment at the point of a bayonet, so democratism exports the ideology of good governance and normative approximation at the point of a pen. The ideology of democratism is backed up by an extensive network of civil society

associations sponsored by the US and European countries. For Russia and other countries the gripe was not so much with democracy as a *practice* but its advancement as a *project* on other countries. This is perceived as aggressive, expansionist and ultimately subversive of state sovereignty. The critique of 'democratism' is often used as a cover for 'the society of despots', but it is also an appeal for a pluralist international order which acknowledges that countries can have different types of development and various modes of engagement with modernity. The geopolitical instrumentalization of democracy taints genuine popular struggles for democracy. Democratism is the foe and not the friend of democracy.

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# ОПАСНОСТИ ДЕМОКРАТИЗМА

**Р. Саква**

**САКВА Ричард,** профессор политических наук, Кентский университет, Кентербери (Великобритания), R.Sakwa@kent.ac.uk

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*Статья поступила в редакцию: 07.12.2022. Принята к публикации: 09.01.2023*

**Abstract.** В аспекте метатеоретической контекстуальности рассматривается возобновившееся политическое противостояние Запада и России. Автор проводит различение демократизма, целенаправленной инструментализации программ демократии в рамках конфликта великих держав, и демократии как реагирующего, рефлексивного и основанного на участии механизма народного контроля над правительством. Завершение холодной войны породило интердемократию, сочетание НАТО и Европейского союза, ставшее основой дальнейшего господства атлантизма на политическом Западе. Это исключало формирование альтернативных механизмов безопасности в Европе после холодной войны, особенно в части панконтинентальных моделей. В то же время политический Запад, сопряжение держав, которое было сформировано во время холодной войны, продвигал трансдемократию, представление о том, что демократия является основой для создания подлинного сообщества безопасности. Опираясь на теорию демократического мира, этот подход заменил демократическим интернационализмом суверенный интернационализм, заложенный ранее в основу международной системы и отраженный в Уставе ООН, принятом в 1945 г. Это породило особый стиль международной политики, который в этой статье описывается как демократизм. Вместо того чтобы преодолевать конфликты, демократизм лишь обостряет антагонизм и таким образом способствует возрождению практики холодной войны, подрывая доверие к либеральному интернационализму. Однако следует отделять такого рода "эффекты отдачи" от неизменного курса борьбы за демократию и остающегося верным принципам Устава ООН стиля международной политики.

**Keywords:** демократизм, демократия, интердемократия, трансдемократия, демократический мир, политический Запад, Хартия международной системы, международная политика.



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