

Democracy and Victory

Michael C. Desch

Fair Fights or Food Fights?

Ajin Choi, David Lake, and Dan Reiter and Allan Stam have each provided useful rejoinders to the critique of democratic triumphalism in my recent article “Democracy and Victory: Why Regime Type Hardly Matters.”¹ In response, I begin by summarizing our arguments and pointing out several issues where we have little or no disagreement. I then examine our two major areas of contention: how best to test whether democracy matters much in explaining military outcomes, and whether the democratic triumphalists’ proposed mechanisms convincingly explain why democracies frequently appear to win their wars.

The Arguments

Democratic triumphalists argue that democracies are more likely to achieve victory in warfare because of the nature of their domestic regimes. According to the triumphalists, democracies (1) start only wars they can win easily, and (2) enjoy important wartime advantages such as greater wealth, stronger alliances, better strategic thinking, higher public support, and more effective soldiers.

After examining the data and methods that underpin these findings, I concluded that “whether a state is democratic is not the *most important* factor to consider” in determining a state’s likelihood of victory in war—hence the subtitle of my article “Why Regime Type *Hardly* Matters” (p. 42, emphasis added). I do not argue that regime type plays no role—only that it appears to be modest compared with other factors.

Michael C. Desch is Professor and Director of the Patterson School of Diplomacy and International Commerce at the University of Kentucky.

The author greatly appreciates the advice and comments of Eugene Gholz, Douglass Gibler, John Mearsheimer, and Scott Wolford as well as research support from Glenn Rudolph.

1. Michael C. Desch, “Democracy and Victory: Why Regime Type Hardly Matters,” *International Security*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (Fall 2002), pp. 5–47. Subsequent references to this article and the rejoinders appear parenthetically in the text.

International Security, Vol. 28, No. 1 (Summer 2003), pp. 180–194
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POINTS OF AGREEMENT

The triumphalists and I recognize the striking empirical regularity that democracies have been on the winning side of most wars since 1815. If one looks at all the cases of wars involving democratic states (with a score of 6 or better on the 21-point [-10 to 10] POLITY Democracy Index), democracies win more than 80 percent of the time. If one broadens the range of cases to look at whether the more democratic state prevailed irrespective of whether it had a democracy score of 6 or higher, the more democratic state prevails more than 70 percent of the time. And even my restrictive subset of “fair fight” cases still credits democracies with winning more than 60 percent of the time. Given this, the triumphalists and I also agree that on balance democracy is not an obstacle to the successful conduct of war.

We also accept that victory is likely to be the result of a variety of factors, including material power and other, nonmaterial, variables (Desch, p. 23; Lake, p. 166; and Reiter and Stam, p. 172). Where we part company is over how much relative influence these factors have in explaining whether a state wisely chooses and then effectively wages war.

There are two other points where the triumphalists suggest that we have major disagreements when in fact we do not. First, Lake and Reiter and Stam argue that I advance a deterministic theory of military victory (i.e., “the more powerful side always wins its wars”), whereas they offer a more theoretically and empirically defensible probabilistic theory of victory (i.e., “more democratic states are more likely to win their wars”)² (Lake, pp. 158–161, and Reiter and Stam, p. 174). This is not an accurate portrayal of my position. When listing the alternative theories that I think better explain victory, I qualified almost every one with words such as “often,” “sometimes,” “likely,” and “could” (Desch, p. 7). Indeed there are few, if any, deterministic theories in the field of international relations.³

2. Contrary to Lake’s claims, multiple case studies can be used to test probabilistic theories because they provide a great deal of information. Not only does this make them an efficient means of testing theories, but it also makes it possible to determine whether or not particular cases are outliers.

3. One exception is the “democratic peace,” whose proponents treat it as “the closest thing we have to an empirical law in the study of international relations.” See Jack S. Levy, “Domestic Politics and War,” in Robert I. Rotberg and Theodore K. Rabb, eds., *The Origin and Prevention of Major Wars* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 88; and James Lee Ray, “Wars between Democracies: Rare or Non-existent?” *International Interactions*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (Spring 1988), pp. 251–276.

Second, Lake argues that causation can be inferred only in the context of a prior theoretical framework and criticizes me for not having one. But elsewhere Lake and Reiter and Stam identify me as a realist based not only on my previous work but also, undoubtedly, on my conclusion that materialist variables such as power play a more important role in explaining victory than does democracy. In other words, they recognize that my explanation of military victory is not divorced from an overarching theoretical framework. Thus, we are in basic agreement about the importance of theory in guiding empirical research.

Points of Contention

Despite these areas of agreement, this exchange has highlighted important differences between the triumphalists and me (as well as among the triumphalists themselves). These include (1) how scholars should gauge democracy's role in explaining victory; and (2) what makes democracies more likely to select winnable wars and fight more effectively. To support their claim that democracy is the key to victory, the triumphalists need to provide both a convincing test of their hypothesis as well as a compelling set of causal mechanisms explaining why democracies should be more likely to win their wars. They have done neither.

DISAGREEMENT #1: HOW TO TEST THE TRIUMPHALISTS' ARGUMENT

In this section I lay out the triumphalists' claims that democracy is the key to victory and show that, with one exception (Choi, pp. 144–145), they fail to demonstrate that regime type is the most important factor in this regard. I then discuss their criticisms of my approaches for measuring democracy's role in explaining military victory.

In their book *Democracies at War*, the most recent and comprehensive statement of the democratic triumphalists' case, Reiter and Stam make strong claims about the role of democracy in explaining why democratic states have been on the winning side of so many wars. They conclude that "democracy has . . . been the *surest* means to power in the arena of battle" and that "democratic political institutions hold the *key* to prudent and successful foreign policy."⁴ Choi similarly argues that "democracies are formidable players in the

4. Dan Reiter and Allan C. Stam III, *Democracies at War* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2002), pp. 197, 205 (emphasis added).

international arena and that the sources of democracies' military prowess are entrenched in their political institutions" (Choi, p. 143).

Instead of measuring the size of the relative effect of democracy and other variables that might explain victory, Lake and Reiter and Stam are content merely to show that democracy is statistically significant in their models (Lake, pp. 165–167, and Reiter and Stam, pp. 175–176). But there is more to interpreting the results of models besides the statistical significance of the variables. Their practical significance, which is a function not only of the variables' statistical significance but also of the size of the coefficient and their signs, must also be considered. "Too much focus on statistical significance," one standard text on econometrics reminds us, "can lead to [the] false conclusion that a variable is 'important' . . . even though its estimated effect is modest."⁵ In short, democracy may be statistically significant but still not be the key to victory.

To measure the practical significance of democracy, I first sought to isolate its effects by focusing on cases in which democracies fought without the advantages of power imbalances, nondemocratic allies, or an asymmetry of interests in their favor. I characterized such cases as "fair fights." My rationale for focusing on these "fair fights" was that because alternative theories of military victory rely on these variables, it is important to find cases where democracies won without these advantages to see if democracy has much independent effect.

To illustrate the effects of focusing on this small subset of cases that I argue are fair tests of the democracy and victory proposition, I reported the results of two simple probit models estimating the relationship between level of democracy and likelihood of victory using the full Reiter and Stam data set ($N = 197$) and my "fair fight" data set ($N = 34$). The models show that by itself the democracy variable becomes insignificant using my data set. Reiter and Stam take me to task for not including a control variable for power, which if included would make the democracy variable significant. They ignore, however, that in Table 4 of "Democracy and Victory" I report that I ran their model 4 of the selection effects argument—including their control variables for military capability—using only the "fair fight" data set and found no significant relationship between their democracy*initiation variable and victory (see Table 1). This suggests that the statistical significance of democracy is highly sensitive to model specification.

5. Jeffrey M. Wooldridge, *Introductory Econometrics: A Modern Approach* (Mason, Ohio: South-Western College Publishing, 2000), p. 131.

Table 1. Selection Effects with Fair-Fight Data (win/lose).

Variable	Model 1
constant	-11.97823 (3.840502)
democracy*initiation	0.1070775 (0.0710027)
initiation	10.33682** (3.606029)
democracy*target	1.167899** (0.3995539)
capabilities	2.870727 (1.803471)
allies capabilities	-1.039488 (1.670907)
quality ratio	0.49914* (0.2532648)
pseudo R ²	0.5227
log likelihood	-10.535901
N	34

NOTE: Standard errors are robust; significance tests are two-tailed.

* $p < 0.05$

** $p < 0.01$

*** $p < 0.001$

Second, I calculated the marginal effects (the impact of a one-unit increase in each independent variable on the likelihood of change in the dependent variable) of democracy and other variables in the triumphalists' models. My reasoning here was that because we all agree that wars are complex and perhaps overdetermined processes, it is necessary to find a means of determining which of these variables play the most crucial role in explaining victory.

Lake and Reiter and Stam object that my dropping of cases that are not "fair fights" is methodologically unsound because it deprives scholars of lots of useful information. There is, however, no methodological problem with focusing on "fair fight" cases, because doing so has an effect similar to adding control variables in a multivariate equation. The purpose of control variables is to account for variation in the dependent variable that may be wrongly attributed to the independent variable. Adding them thus avoids this "omitted variable

bias.”⁶ Although adding control variables is the standard approach in the observational social sciences, my dropping cases where the winner had an overwhelming power advantage is akin to running a controlled experiment in the natural sciences. Both approaches are scientifically valid means of controlling for the effects of potentially perturbing variables.⁷

The real issue is whether limiting consideration to just “fair fights” provides an equitable test of the democratic triumphalists’ theories. Lake argues that my looking at only “fair fights” is an unfair test of his theory because he believes that one of the wartime advantages of democracies is their ability to generate more wealth, which in turn gives them greater military resources with which to wage war. Because wealth is one of the sinews of military power, it is not surprising that wealthier states tend to win their wars. Excluding such cases, in Lake’s view, eliminates those cases on which his theory depends.

There are two problems with Lake’s argument: First, his theory is impossible to test against the most likely alternative theory: that states win when they have a preponderance of power. Second, as Lake acknowledges (p. 164), it is possible that the relationship between democracy and victory is spurious, inasmuch as wealth may explain both democracy and military success. Lake’s subsequent effort to establish the causal chain from democracy to wealth by showing that democracies are more likely to provide public services does not shed much light on the question of whether democracies are likely to produce greater wealth.⁸

Reiter and Stam also challenge Lake’s claim that democratic states are better able to generate wealth.⁹ Instead they maintain that democracies start only wars they can easily win. But like Lake, they maintain that focusing on “fair fights” is not an adequate test of their theory because they claim that the main advantage of democracies is finding unfair fights.

The problem here is the inconsistency between Reiter and Stam’s response to me and their critique of Lake and others who argue that democracies win wars

6. Gary King, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 168–184.

7. For discussion of the similarities of the two approaches, see Alan Agresti and Barbara Finlay, *Statistical Methods for Social Sciences*, 3d ed. (Upper Saddle, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1999), pp. 359–362.

8. David A. Lake and Matthew A. Baum, “The Invisible Hand of Democracy: Political Control and the Provision of Public Services,” *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 6 (August 2001), pp. 587–621.

9. Reiter and Stam, *Democracies at War*, pp. 114–143.

because they are wealthier. After testing Lake's wealth argument, Reiter and Stam conclude that they "can reject two hypotheses: that democracies in general win their wars because they have higher capabilities, and that democratic initiators win wars because they have significantly higher capabilities than do other kinds of initiators." Elsewhere they note that their selection effects argument "does not imply that [democracies] win because they are more powerful, rather that they are better at avoiding wars they would have gone on to lose had they fought them."¹⁰ It is difficult to reconcile these arguments that power imbalances do not explain victory with their claim in their response to me that democratic initiators tend to win because they are better at selecting "unfair fights" in which they have a decided advantage in military power (Reiter and Stam, p. 170).

Even if the core of Reiter and Stam's argument is that democracies' main advantage is their ability to select weak adversaries, regime type may not play the key role here. In "Democracy and Victory," I calculated the marginal effects of the variables in the triumphalists' selection effects model—using all their cases—and concluded that of all of the variables democracy had one of the smallest impacts on the likelihood of victory.

Reiter and Stam respond that this approach is inappropriate for assessing their selection effects argument for two reasons. First, because the democracy variable is included as part of an interaction term with an initiation variable, it cannot be gauged in this fashion. Second, because the democracy and power variables have different scales, calculating their marginal effects is like comparing apples and oranges. Their democracy*initiation interaction variable, however, is just 1 or 0 (whether the state initiated the war or not) multiplied by its democracy score. There is little reason to think that marginal effects cannot be calculated for it in the same way they would be for the straight democracy variable. Although it is true that the democracy and power variables have different scales, if one calculates elasticities (the effects of a percentage increase in the independent variables which makes them more comparable) rather than marginal effects, democracy still has a relatively small impact on the likelihood of victory.¹¹

In sum, the triumphalists' research design does not convincingly demonstrate that democracy is the main reason states win their wars.

10. *Ibid.*, pp. 20, 138.

11. The elasticity for democracy*initiation is -0.0486938 ; for the state's capabilities, it is 0.9587111 ; and for its allies' capabilities, it is 0.6250279 .

DISAGREEMENT #2: RESERVATIONS ABOUT THE CAUSAL MECHANISMS

In my article I criticized the triumphalists' arguments that democracies are more likely to win their wars because of selection effects and greater wartime effectiveness. The triumphalists offer various defenses of these causal mechanisms, but many problems remain.

SELECTION EFFECTS. Although in Reiter and Stam's data set democracies win 94 percent of the wars they start, it is questionable whether this success is due to the fact that democratic political leaders are more careful because they fear electoral retribution if they lose.¹² The triumphalists have only a handful of cases of democracies starting wars; the coding of many of them is questionable; and in many of the others, the triumphalists' causal mechanisms do not operate.

There are only 16 cases of democracies starting wars since 1815, and half of these involve the same three countries: Britain, Israel, and the United States. Given that only three states account for such a large proportion of the winners, it is useful to ask how generalizable the triumphalists' findings are (see Table 2).

Moreover, the coding of 6 of these cases is questionable because democracies did not initiate the wars. Reiter and Stam and other triumphalists credit Britain, France, and the United States with initiating the Boxer Rebellion in 1900, ignoring the fact that diplomats and citizens of those countries were already under attack by the Boxers when the Western powers sent their relief expedition to China.¹³ The 1919 Czech-Hungarian War is widely considered to have begun with Hungarian Communist Bela Kun's attack on Slovakia rather than with democratic Czechoslovakia attacking Hungary as the triumphalists maintain.¹⁴ Finally, they count Britain and the United States as having initiated the 1941 through 1945 phase of World War II in Europe, despite the fact that Germany began that war in 1939 with its attack on Poland. In sum, there are only 10 clear cases of democracies starting wars since 1815.

These 10 cases must be closely examined to see whether the triumphalists' causal mechanisms really explain why these democracies won their wars. De-

12. I arrive at slightly different numbers than Reiter and Stam, because in Appendix 2.2 they list the United States as initiating the European phase of World War II, but in my copy of their data set they do not. *Ibid.*, pp. 52–57.

13. Michael Clodfelter, *Warfare and Armed Conflicts: A Statistical Reference to Casualty and Other Figures, 1618–1991* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 1992), p. 643.

14. George Childs Kohn, *Dictionary of Wars*, rev. ed. (New York: Facts on File, 1999), p. 264; and R. Ernest Dupuy and Trevor N. Dupuy, *The Harper Encyclopedia of Military History: From 3500 B.C. to the Present* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), p. 1091.

Table 2. Assessment of Triumphalists' Selection Effects Cases.

Status	Cases
Questionable coding	France/Boxer Rebellion (1900) United Kingdom/Boxer Rebellion United States/Boxer Rebellion Czech-Hungarian War (1919) United Kingdom/World War II (1941–45) United States/World War II (1941–45)
Process tracing supports selection effects	Spanish-American (1898) First Balkan (1912–13) Six Day War (1967) Bangladesh (1971) Turkey/Cyprus Invasion (1974)
Process tracing does not support selection effects	Mexican War (1846–48) Greco-Turkish War (1897) Russo-Polish War (1919–20) Sinai War (1956) Lebanon War (1982)

mocracies, according to the triumphalists, should be better at finding easy fights because they cannot start wars if there is substantial public opposition; they should enjoy free and high-quality debate about war; democratic leaders will suffer or prosper depending on how the war goes; and so the primary concern of democratic leaders in starting wars should be their influence on the fate of the leader.¹⁵ Rather than directly testing these propositions in detailed case studies, the triumphalists are largely content with establishing a correlation between the democracy, initiation, and victory variables and inferring that the selection effect explains it.

A closer examination of the 10 remaining cases shows that the triumphalists' causal mechanisms do not explain many instances of democratic victory. To be sure, their propositions appear to be at work in 5 cases: the 1898 Spanish American War, the First Balkan War of 1912–13, the 1967 Six Day War, the 1971 Bangladesh War, and Turkey's 1974 invasion of Cyprus. However, in the other 5—the Mexican War of 1846–48, the 1897 Greco-Turkish War, the Russo-Polish War of 1919–20, the 1956 Sinai War, and Israel's Lebanon War of 1982—democracy does not seem to be the explanation for why these countries did or did not launch successful wars. Instead of democracies winning a very impressive 94

15. Reiter and Stam, *Democracies at War*, pp. 10, 19–20, 21, 23, 144, 146, 162.

percent of the wars they start, democratic selection effects actually explain only 50 percent of these victories.

The 1846–48 U.S.-Mexican War does not support many of the triumphalists' propositions. For example, President James Polk started the war without substantial public and congressional support: Many Americans opposed the annexation of Texas, fearing it would upset the delicate balance between free and slave-holding states.¹⁶ Nor was there much open debate about what came to be called "Mr. Polk's War," which the president initiated by secretly sending U.S. forces into a disputed area of the border, where they were sure to be attacked by the Mexicans.¹⁷ It is difficult to ascertain from this case whether victory helped the domestic fortunes of the Polk regime: He did not run for re-election after the war. His party—the Whigs—lost the election to Zachary Taylor, whose campaign was clearly aided by his role in the victorious war. But overall, Polk's motive appears to have been not domestic political gain but rather territorial consolidation of U.S. control of North America.¹⁸

The 1897 Greco-Turkish War does not support the triumphalists' argument because after Greece's loss to the Turks, Greek Crown Prince Constantine—the military commander—was not punished for losing the war. Indeed he would again command Greek military forces in the First Balkan War and eventually become king of Greece.¹⁹

The Russo-Polish War of 1919–20 also provides little support for the triumphalists' causal mechanisms. Despite Poland's democratic institutions and widespread opposition to war with Russia, the Polish military leader Jozef Piłsudski was not deterred from launching it. "Piłsudski," as Richard Watt concludes "kept his own counsel and made his own plans, paying no great attention to the desires of the Sejm, the majority of whose members, both on the Left and on the Right, wanted peace with Soviet Russia."²⁰ The triumphalists' selection effects argument assumes that both the public and civilian government

16. Thomas A. Bailey, *A Diplomatic History of the American People*, 10th ed. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1970), p. 257; and Robert H. Ferrell, *American Diplomacy: A History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1975), p. 190.

17. Bailey, *A Diplomatic History of the American People*, p. 256.

18. John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001), pp. 242–244.

19. C.M. Woodhouse, *Modern Greece: A Short History* (London: Faber and Faber, 1986), p. 193.

20. Richard M. Watt, *Bitter Glory: Poland and Its Fate, 1918–1939* (New York: Hippocrene, 1982), p. 105. Also cf. Serge Michiel Shewchuk, "The Russo-Polish War of 1920," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Maryland, 1966, p. 146; Adam Zamoyski, *The Battle for the Marchlands* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), p. 6; and Viscount D'Abernon, *The Eighteenth Decisive Battle of the World* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1931), p. 39.

officials have some input into, and knowledge about, the conduct of wars. Piłsudski, however, had complete authority for running the war and kept the rest of the government in the dark.²¹ One foreign ministry official wondered in 1919: “Where are we going? This question intrigues everybody. . . . To the Dnieper? To the Dvina? And then?”²² Nor is it clear that the changing course of the war had much effect on Piłsudski’s political fortunes. During the bleakest days before the miraculous turnabout in August 1920, there was no discernible loss of support for Piłsudski or any effort to reduce his substantial authority. Finally, there is little evidence that Piłsudski thought much about the war in terms of his political fortunes in the Polish democratic political system. The only consistent elements in Piłsudski’s life were Polish nationalism and the struggle for Poland’s independence.²³

Nor does Israel’s successful 1956 Sinai campaign support the selection effects argument. Neither the Israeli public nor the cabinet strongly supported the war, as evidenced by the great lengths to which Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion went to keep preparations for the operation a secret.²⁴ Only ten Israeli civilians besides Ben-Gurion knew about the war before October 25, 1956, and the Israeli cabinet was informed only the night before military operations began.²⁵ Indeed Ben-Gurion alone made all the decisions about the war.²⁶ As one of his colleagues famously quipped: “Ben-Gurion the defense minister consulted with Ben-Gurion the foreign minister and received the green light from Ben-Gurion the prime minister.”²⁷ The results of the war were mixed (Israel reduced the *fedayeen* threat from Egypt but was forced to unilaterally withdraw from the Sinai; it also became increasingly isolated internationally).

21. Watt, *Bitter Glory*, p. 125; Michael Palij, *The Ukrainian-Polish Defensive Alliance, 1919–1921: An Aspect of the Ukrainian Revolution* (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press, 1995), p. 118; Norman Davies, *White Eagle, Red Star: The Polish-Soviet War, 1919–20* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1972), p. 31; and Robert Szymczak, “Bolshevik Wave Breaks at Warsaw,” *Military History*, Vol. 11, No. 6 (February 1995), p. 56.

22. Quoted in Watt, *Bitter Glory*, p. 99.

23. Zygmunt J. Gasiowski, “Joseph Piłsudski in the Light of British Reports,” *Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. 50, No. 121 (1972), p. 566.

24. Hugh Thomas, *Suez* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), p. 16; and Avner Yaniv and Robert J. Lieber, “Personal Whim or Strategic Imperative? The Israeli Invasion of Lebanon,” *International Security*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (Fall 1983), p. 140.

25. Michael Brecher, *Decisions in Israel’s Foreign Policy* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1975), pp. 232–234; and Zeev Schiff, *A History of the Israeli Army: 1847 to the Present* (New York: Macmillan, 1985), p. 93.

26. Howard M. Sachar, *A History of Israel: From the Rise of Zionism to Our Time*, 2d ed. (New York: Knopf, 1996), p. 478; and Avi Shlaim, *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001), p. 149.

27. Moshe Sharett, quoted in Shlaim, *The Iron Wall*, p. 150.

Moreover, their effects on Ben-Gurion's political career remain unclear.²⁸ But there is little evidence that domestic political concerns were of much importance to Ben-Gurion, who seemed to make strategic decisions overwhelmingly in terms of what he thought was best for Israel's survival and prosperity.²⁹

Israel's 1982 war against Syria in Lebanon also provides no support for the triumphalists' selection effects argument. Prime Minister Menachem Begin and Defense Minister Ariel Sharon began the war despite overwhelming opposition from the cabinet and the Israeli public, who opposed transforming a retaliatory raid against Palestine Liberation Organization forces in south Lebanon into a war with Syria.³⁰ Nor did Israeli democracy foster thoughtful debate via the marketplace of ideas. Begin refused to listen to the objections of military and intelligence professionals, and Sharon kept the cabinet in the dark about the scope of the Israeli operation and thwarted efforts by Israel's press to inform the public about their plans.³¹ All the major decisions about the war were made by a small group of individuals: Begin, Sharon, Foreign Minister Yitzak Shamir, and Chief of Staff Gen. Rafael Eitan.³² Despite Israel's tactical victory over Syria, the general impression among Israelis was that the war was a failure.³³ Syria was not ejected from Lebanon, and by the mid-1980s it had again become the dominant power in that country. Although Israel's failure in Lebanon did exact some political costs, neither Begin nor Sharon suffered serious political punishment: Begin resigned in 1983, largely for personal reasons;³⁴ and Sharon lost his defense portfolio (largely because of the massacres

28. *Ibid.*, pp. 183–185; Sachar, *A History of Israel*, pp. 513–514; and Thomas Baylis, *How Israel Was Won: A Concise History of the Arab-Israeli Conflict* (Lanham, Md.: Lexington, 1999), p. 125.

29. Brecher, *Decisions in Israel's Foreign Policy*, p. 65.

30. Zeev Schiff and Ehud Ya'ari, *Israel's Lebanon War* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984), pp. 34, 55, 57, 127, 163; Schiff, *A History of the Israeli Army*, pp. 239–240; Martin Gilbert, *Israel: A History* (New York: William Morrow, 1998), p. 504; Lieber and Yaniv, "Personal Whim or Strategic Imperative?" p. 137; and Trevor N. Dupuy and Paul Martell, *Flawed Victory: The Arab-Israeli Conflict and the 1982 War in Lebanon* (Fairfax, Va.: HERO Books, 1986), pp. 60, 148.

31. Schiff and Ya'ariv, *Israel's Lebanon War*, pp. 33, 39, 41, 58, 97, 100, 101, 103, 113, 266–268, 303, 304; Shlaim, *The Iron Wall*, p. 397; Schiff, *A History of the Israeli Army*, p. 246; Richard Gabriel, *Operation Peace for Galilee: The Israeli-PLO War in Lebanon* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1984), p. 68; and Dupuy and Martell, *Flawed Victory*, pp. 96, 142.

32. Schiff and Ya'ariv, *Israel's Lebanon War*, pp. 43, 164, 181, 212–213; and Gabriel, *Operation Peace for Galilee*, p. 158.

33. Schiff and Ya'ariv, *Israel's Lebanon War*, p. 293; Benny Morris, *Righteous Victims: A History of the Zionist-Arab Conflict, 1881–1999* (New York: Knopf, 1999), p. 590; Anthony H. Cordesman, *The Arab-Israeli Military Balance and the Art of Operations* (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, 1987), pp. 55–56; and Dupuy and Martell, *Flawed Victory*, p. 154.

34. Schiff and Ya'ariv, *Israel's Lebanon War*, p. 284; Sachar, *A History of Israel*, p. 920; and Shlaim, *The Iron Wall*, p. 419.

at the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps), but he remained in the cabinet and eventually became Israel's prime minister.³⁵ Shamir also later became prime minister. There is little evidence that their domestic political fates affected either Begin's or Sharon's calculations about the advisability of the war with Syria. For Begin, intervention in Lebanon was largely about saving the Christian community from slaughter at the hands of the Muslims.³⁶ For Sharon, the war was about advancing his plan to fundamentally reshape the Middle East to increase Israel's security.³⁷

Finding cases where democracies did not start losing wars is as important for proving the triumphalists' selection effects argument as identifying cases they did start and win. Reiter and Stam briefly mention only two candidates, however: the 1898 Fashoda crisis and the 1911 Moroccan crisis. In neither instance do they show that the specific mechanisms of democracy led France to avoid war. Indeed, in the latter case they quote French Prime Minister Joseph Caillaux endorsing Napoleon's advice not to go to war unless the chances of victory were higher than 70 percent. Because Napoleonic France was an autocracy, it is not true that only democracies are selective about their wars.³⁸ The triumphalists need to do much more work to identify cases of democracies not going to war because they thought they would lose, and demonstrate that this assessment was the result of the specific mechanisms of the triumphalists' selection effects argument.

In sum, the causal mechanisms that the triumphalists believe encourage democratic leaders to be more cautious about the wars they wage do not explain victory in a large number of cases. This weakens scholars' confidence in their selection effects theory of democratic victory.

WARTIME EFFECTIVENESS. In "Democracy and Victory," I offered two reasons why the triumphalists' wartime effectiveness arguments are unpersuasive. First, the logic behind their causal mechanisms is flawed; and second, their evidence is weak. In their responses, the triumphalists are far less vigorous in defending their causal mechanisms. Reiter and Stam, for example, concede that the evidence undergirding their argument that soldiers in democracies fight better is problematic (p. 179); and Choi also admits that the audience costs ar-

35. Shlaim, *The Iron Wall*, p. 417; and Schiff, *A History of the Israeli Army*, pp. 238, 240.

36. Schiff and Ya'ariv, *Israel's Lebanon War*, pp. 25, 34, 39, 220; Sachar, *A History of Israel*, pp. 900, 913, 916, 920; and Dupuy and Martell, *Flawed Victory*, p. 15.

37. Schiff and Ya'ariv, *Israel's Lebanon War*, p. 230.

38. Reiter and Stam, *Democracies at War*, pp. 12–13. John J. Mearsheimer, *Conventional Deterrence* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1983), examines cases of both democracies (Britain, France, India, and Israel) and nondemocracies (Egypt, Germany, North Korea, the Soviet Union, and Vietnam) that started wars only when they thought they had a high chance of victory.

gument does not provide a solid foundation for the claim that democracies make better allies (p. 143). In fact, these various battlefield effectiveness arguments are controversial among the triumphalists themselves. In their book, Reiter and Stam reject Lake's theory that the lack of state rent-seeking makes democracies better allies, and they conclude that realist theories of alliance behavior seem to best explain the alignment decisions of both democracies and nondemocracies.³⁹

In her response, Choi seeks to rescue the triumphalist alliance argument by offering a new theory that holds that democracies, because they are more transparent and have checks and balances, enjoy an advantage in war because they form cohesive and reliable alignments. I have four reservations about her argument. First, the number of democratic partners in an alliance—the measure for the independent variable in her quantitative analysis—does not really capture her causal mechanisms: that the presence of checks and balances and greater transparency in democracies makes them more reliable allies.

Second, there is reason to question whether greater transparency makes democratic alliances more reliable. Often, rather than clarifying what is going on in a democracy, transparency overwhelms outside observers with excessive and contradictory information.⁴⁰ Also, the number of checks and balances can vary from democracy to democracy, and it is possible to have them in non-democracies too. In other words, it is not clear that transparency and checks and balances make democracies better allies.

Third, historically there have been few all-democratic alliances, which presents something of a puzzle for Choi's argument. If a larger number of democracies make an alliance more reliable, cohesive, and thereby more effective, then the most effective alliances should be those composed purely of democracies. In the COW data set, though, there is only one purely democratic alliance—Britain, France, and Israel in the Suez War—and that alliance was not a model of cohesiveness and reliability.⁴¹ Moreover, if nondemocracies are less attractive allies than democracies, why have most alliances involved a combination of both democracies and nondemocracies?

Finally, Choi does not solve the problem of determining which state made the greater contribution to victory in a mixed alliance. Everything she says about the relations between Britain and the United States being more harmoni-

39. Reiter and Stam, *Democracies at War*, p. 105.

40. Bernard I. Finel and Kristin M. Lord, "The Surprising Logic of Transparency," *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 43, No. 2 (June 1999), pp. 315–339.

41. Shlaim, *The Iron Wall*, pp. 162–185.

ous than relations between the democracies and the Soviet Union during World War II may be true; nevertheless, the Soviet Union played the principal role in the defeat of Germany. “Few would now contest,” notes historian Richard Overy, “that the Soviet war effort was the most important factor . . . in the defeat of Germany.”⁴²

Conclusion

Democracies seem to have won most of their wars over the last 200 years and so the triumphalists have identified an intriguing empirical regularity. Yet there remain significant problems both with how the triumphalists test their claim that democracy is the key to victory and with the causal mechanisms that they suggest explain why democracies have so often been on the winning side of wars. In other words, the democratic triumphalists have not yet provided a compelling explanation for the correlation between democracy and victory. Given this, I hope that our exchange spurs more research by both proponents and critics of the proposition that democracy is the key to military victory.

42. Richard Overy, *Russia's War: A History of the Soviet War Effort, 1941–1945* (Harmondsworth, U.K.: Penguin, 1997), p. xi.