

Does Democracy Have a Violent Heart?*

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*** Concluding chapter for David Pritchard (ed.), *War, Democracy and Culture in Classical Athens* (Cambridge University Press, 2010).**

The subject of war and democracy, and their potential symbiosis, has recently been brought to life by the fact that virtually all democracies are today caught in the sticky threads of a permanent war against 'terror'. In the name of 'democracy protection' and 'democracy promotion', armies have been gathered and sent to foreign countries; more than a few democratic institutions have been militarised, as if the permanent war for democracy has necessitated the trimming of their power-sharing, representative mechanisms. Civilians are subjected to dummy exercises, new forms of surveillance and routine 'security' checks; police powers have been expanded; the dark arts of surveillance are flourishing; and enemy torture has been justified publicly. All citizens have meanwhile been warned to be on guard, at all times, to conduct themselves as if their daily lives are a permanent battlefield. Electorates have even heard loud calls by politicians and intellectuals to protect governments, at home and abroad, by taking 'pre-emptive military actions against grave threats to their survival or to their civilian population'.¹

Pressured by these trends - I say nothing yet of counter-trends - it is unsurprising that more than a few observers have recently drawn the conclusion that democracies have violent proclivities. Democracy is said to have a 'dark side' that sups with the devils of political violence; or it is claimed that democracy 'kills'.² One scholar has drawn the colourful conclusion that 'the origin and heart of democracy is essentially violent'. Violence, defined (loosely) as 'action forceful enough to produce an effect', is not just the result of contingent policies of particular democratically elected governments. It is inherent in every effort to establish or maintain democracy, if by that is meant 'any political system grounded in the idea that sovereignty lies with the people'. The principle of the sovereignty of the people can never be established democratically, or so it is argued. Democracy (it is said) is a strange impossibility. It always and everywhere rests upon foundational acts of violence: 'the massacre of indigenous populations, or the crushing of those who oppose a new foundation of the people's sovereignty' as well as 'the ongoing history of forgetting this original violence, not

¹ Alan Dershowitz, *Preemption. A Knife That Cuts Both Ways* (New York and London 2006), p. 239.

² Paul Collier, *Wars, Guns, and Votes* (London and New York, 2009); Michael Mann, *The Dark Side of Democracy* (Cambridge and New York, 2005); and Humphrey Hawksley, *Democracy Kills. What's So Good About the Vote?* (London 2009)

out of spite or indifference, but because the violence at the origin of democracy threatens democracy itself.’¹

The Democratisation of Violence

The conjecture that democracy and bellicosity are terrible twins is a healthy corrective to evolutionist views of democracy (like those of Francis Fukuyama²) that see only its benign freedom-loving qualities, or prefer to emphasise its ‘world-historical’ tendency to spread secular, science-induced economic growth across the whole earth. To insist that democracy has a violent heart is correctly to draw attention to the entanglement of democratic institutions and ideals in the facts and fantasies of war, but the protest it launches against democracy as an engine of war - paradoxically - feeds upon a deep-seated historical tendency for democracies to ‘denature’ war and other forms of violence. Like the rebellious teenager whose hot-tempered behaviour owes much to careful parental nurturing in the arts of resisting deference, so the thesis that democracy has a violent heart is symptomatic of the unusual sensitivity of actually existing democracies to war, and to other forms of violence. Contemporary democracies enable the ‘democratisation of violence’. By this unfamiliar phrase I do not mean that they encourage the arming of all citizens and their engagement in acts of violence of their choice - something like a macabre reversal of the historic ‘ballots, not bullets’ principle. To speak of the democratisation of violence is rather to say that democracies as we have come to know them unleash a process of the denaturing of violence in policy fields as different as the treatment of children and women in household settings through to efforts to rein in political leaders and military personnel who show no respect for others’ dignity and instead practise cruelty as a way of life. The neologism (from the late 1950s) of ‘domestic violence’, the invention of *satyagraha* (‘velvet’) protest tactics, the spread of human rights culture and the public trial of bellicose heads of state all bear witness to this trend. The historical roots of this denaturing of violence run deep and are complicated. Their causes and causers - all unknown to the world of Athenian *dēmokratia* - include the invention of political mechanisms of peaceful compromise (parliaments, for instance), the birth of civil

¹ Daniel Ross, *Violent Democracy* (Melbourne 2005), especially the introduction, from which the citations are drawn.

² See the new afterword of Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and The Last Man* (New York 2006).

societies, the growth of constitutional government, changing modes of warfare, and bad experiences with the cruelty of both anti-democratic and democratic regimes doing things in the name of 'the people'. There is no space here to examine these trends in all their complexity, but the myriad symptoms are clear.¹ Institutions and acts of violence are no longer seen exclusively as willed by gods or a God, or determined by historical fate, or by dastardly 'human nature'. Non-violent methods of publicly checking and regulating institutions of violence take root; they seek to ensure that these institutions - police forces, armies, secret intelligence bodies, private security companies - neither perpetrate surplus violence nor become permanently 'owned' by any particular power group, including the government of the day. The democratisation of war and other types of violence is a process that has the effect of rendering institutions and acts of violence *publicly accountable* and as therefore *contingent*: as acts of destructive power that are alterable and preventable through human will and effort. This process of 'democratisation' even affects the terms war and violence. The scope of application of these descriptors broadens; their meaning comes to be seen as heavily context-dependent and, hence, as variable in time and space; in consequence of which the terms 'war' and 'violence' and their legitimacy come to be contested in such fields as criminal law, journalism, government policy – and (as is evident in recent controversies about torture) even within the ranks of armies whose ultimate job brief is to kill other human beings.

Why and how do democracies 'democratise' or de-nature war and other forms of violence? For a start, they enable public criticism of its necessity by means of clusters of institutions that facilitate citizens' efforts to organise themselves and to speak about power and its abuse. (The force of open public criticism is usually felt during transitions to democracy, when public suspicion of men and institutions of violence is expressed with a sudden vengeance, like a geological upheaval: the *ancien regime* is accused of rape and murder; searches begin for those who have been disappeared; clandestine mass graves are exhumed; citizens are urged to tell their stories of cruelty and suffering.) The literature and art produced and/or circulated under democratic conditions, or with democratic aspirations, have been leaders in the critical representation of war and violence, and its pity. Various forms of democratic art aim

¹ More detailed analysis can be found in my *Violence and Democracy* (London and New York 2004) and *The Life and Death of Democracy* (London and New York 2009).

to sensitise their audiences to the contingency or non-necessity of violence: think of *De Profundis* by Shostakovich, music set to the words of lament written by Lorca for loved ones murdered by Franco's troops; or the satires of war and warmongers that flowed from the typewriters of Robert Graves and other English war poets; or the novels and short stories of writers otherwise as different as Nabokov, Céline and Kafka. Democracies also suffer a normative problem with the cruelty and death that war brings. If democracy, to put it simply, is a set of institutions and a whole way of life structured by non-violent means of equally apportioning and publicly monitoring power within and among overlapping communities of people who live according to a wide variety of morals, then war and violence - the unwanted interference with the bodies and personality of subjects - are anathema to its substance and spirit. But there is something about democracy that runs deeper than ethics: a quality of democracy that is usually given insufficient attention by observers but captured powerfully in one of the greatest odes to the democratisation of 'spirit' that democracies encourage and require, Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Über Gewissheit* (1959). It is this: the institutional dynamics and everyday culture of democratic institutions require for their operation shared perceptions of the complexity and contingency of things, of the non-necessity of what is given, an understanding that reality is not 'real', that claims to veracity can be doubted because they inevitably depend upon the acknowledgement of others, that in principle the extant power relations in any context can be named, re-described, challenged and altered.

Empire and Democracy

The contemporary democratisation of war and violence is merely a trend, with no historical guarantees of success, yet it implies and demands greater sensitivity to time-space variations of the vexed relationship between war and democracy. Essentialist propositions such as 'democracy is inherently bellicose' or 'violence is at the heart of democracy' should be doubted. They must be set aside in favour of efforts to think more deeply about their historically contingent relationship, beginning but not ending with the case of the *dēmokratia* of Athens.

The evidence assembled in this volume convincingly shows that the Athenian experiment with power-sharing and power-constraining democratic institutions was

thoroughly entangled in contingent circumstances of city state rivalry, empire-building, war and rumours of war. Especially from the time of the first efforts to assume leadership of a confederacy of Greek states, called the Delian League, whose several hundred members vowed ‘to have the same friends and enemies’ and whose military aim was the liberation from Persian control of the Greek island states and cities of Asia Minor (modern Turkey), Athens, step by step, state by state, turned herself into an imperial power – what the Athenians called an *arkhē*. Athenian democracy became good at launching and winning wars; despite the profusion of opportunities for citizens to become involved in politics, there were few signs of the democratisation of violence. If anything, the opposite was the case: imperial democracy in Athenian form developed a reputation at home and abroad for its *prophasis*, its growing power to strike fear into the hearts of others and, thus, to precipitate violent reactions. Among the most shocking things about Athens, it must be said, is that belligerence ran so deeply through its veins that the most famous oration in its defence (as Nicole Loraux has pointed out¹) was a strangely aristocratic discourse that revealed much about the fascination of Pericles with imperial power and the ‘normality’ of democratic violence. Even more shocking - this point has hardly been explored in scholarship on Athens - is that the very word *dēmokratia* was infected by the spirit of war.²

¹ Nicole Loraux, *The Invention of Athens: The Funeral Oration in the Classical City* (Cambridge, Mass., 1993).

² See my *The Life and Death of Democracy* (London and New York 2009), especially pp. 55-62. The word *dēmokratia* (from *dēmos* and *kratos*, rule) became common currency in Athens during the early decades of transition sparked by the reforms of Cleisthenes and popular resistance to military intervention by the Spartans under Cleomenes. Historians like to say that the word carried several connotations, including for instance descriptive references to the *deme* and more positive links with the assembly of citizens, the *dēmos*. That is a fair but limited observation, for it fails to spot how the deeply negative connotations of the word *dēmokratia* – a form of polity defined by the exercise by some of self-interested or sectional power over others – are buried within the very word itself. The verb *kratein* (*κρατεῖν*) is usually translated as ‘to rule’ or ‘to govern’, but in fact its original connotations are harsher, tougher, even brutal. To use the verb *kratein* is to speak the language of military manoeuvring and military conquest: *kratein* means to be master of, to conquer, to lord over, to possess (in modern Greek the same verb means to keep, or to hold), to be the stronger, to prevail or get the upper hand over somebody or something. The story of the origins of the world and the birth of the deities told by the Greek poet Hesiod in his *Theogony* uses *kratein* in this way: the personified figure of Kratos is seen as the no-nonsense, loyal agent of the much-feared Zeus. Homer’s *Odyssey* and Sappho’s *Supplements* use *kratein* in the same sense. The noun *kratos* (*κράτος*), from which the compound *dēmokratia* was formed, similarly refers to might, strength, imperial majesty, toughness, triumphant power, and victory over others, especially through the application of force. The now obsolete verb *dēmokrateo* (*δημοκρατέω*) brims with all of these connotations: it means to grasp power, or to exercise control over others. Seen from a twenty-first century vantage point, these are strange connotations, exactly because the word *dēmokratia* had the opposite meaning of what most democrats today mean when they speak of democracy, in much more positive and complex ways, as non-violent inclusiveness, as power-

Judged in terms of the democratisation of violence principle, the Athenian experiment with democracy started badly. To see why requires a closer examination of the connection between empire and democracy - a connection insufficiently researched in this volume, and elsewhere in the literature on war and democracy. The Athenian polity democracy quickly grew to be an imperial polity: a dominant power whose rulers were prone to measure their strength against all their rivals combined. Pericles put the point succinctly: the power of democratic Athens at the beginning of the Peloponnesian War lay in her possession of naval forces more numerous and efficient than those of the rest of Hellas. So did Alcibiades, who doubted the possibility that Athens could exercise a 'careful stewardship' of its empire, exactly because those powers who do not 'hold empire over other peoples' themselves risk succumbing to 'the empire of others'.¹ It was from this standpoint that democracy in Athens became synonymous with the armed struggle for freedom and power over others. Fighting against enemies not only made men feel that they were worthwhile citizens (the Athenians spoke of *khrestos politēs*). It also brought wealth to their pockets. The consolidation of imperial power tempted the Athenians to centralise their control over key legal cases, in effect to bring capital cases from the periphery to Athens revenues. That move created more opportunities for the citizens of Athens to earn income and to participate in its legal machinery, which consequently grew in size and importance within the overall structures of the polity.² Empire also brought wealth and to the democracy, partly to pay for its machinery of government and to employ vast numbers of ordinary Athenian males as soldiers. Save for a small number of states that chose to keep their nominal independence by providing ships that sailed in the Athenian fleets, all cities of the empire were required (by the early 440s BCE) to pay an annual tribute; they were required as well to fork out duties on exports and imports that passed through the hub port of Piraeus.

sharing based on compromise and fairness, as equality based upon the legally guaranteed respect for others' dignity.

¹ Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, Book 1, 143, 1 and Book 6, 18, 3; among the long-neglected works on democracy and empire are John A. Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study* (London 1902); Franklin H. Giddings, *Democracy and Empire, with studies of their psychological, economic, and moral foundations* (New York 1900); and George Veitch, *Empire and Democracy: 1837-1913* (London 1913).

² See the remarks of John M. Camp, *The Athenian Agora. Excavations in the Heart of Classical Athens* (London 1986), pp. 46-47.

The extent to which the wealth generated by empire was vital for the survival of democracy remains disputed, but without doubt among the most potent effects of empire was to expand the power and influence of the military in the day-to-day functioning of the polity.¹ Several contributors to this volume detail these effects: more money from the public budget was spent on war and preparations for war than on any other activity. The revenues generated by empire were used to revolutionise the standard methods of war. The Athenians experimented with siege warfare and tactical retreat. They trained their hoplites and naval crews for weeks and sometimes months, and developed the art of using their ships as high-speed, offensive weapons. Huge numbers of ships and fighters were moved around the whole of the eastern Mediterranean for campaigns that sometimes lasted months or, when sieges were used, up to a year; even during peace time, up to a hundred ships on practice and guard missions spent several months a year cruising the seas.

The democracy, already enjoying among its friends and enemies a reputation for being a busybody, for its eternal restlessness (*polypragmon*), hatched and executed new plans for fighting simultaneously on several fronts. During the fifth century, as David Pritchard notes, Athens found itself at war on average two out of every three years; never once did it enjoy more than a decade of peace.² Especially with the introduction of pay for military service in the 450s BCE, war came to dominate the everyday lives of Athenians, their visual arts, the proceedings of their assembly. Citizenship and military service grew to be indistinguishable: the spirit and institutions of democracy felt deeply ‘martial’.

The dalliance of democracy and armed force had wider, geopolitical implications. The democracy obviously carried within it the seeds of expansion by bellicose, anti-

¹ G.E.M. de Sainte Croix, ‘The Character of the Athenian Empire’, *Historia* 3 (1954), pp. 1-41 and *Athenian Democratic Origins and Other Essays*, edited by D. Harvey and R. Parker (Oxford 2004); K.A. Raaflaub, ‘Democracy, Power and Imperialism in Fifth-Century Athens’, in J.P. Euben et. al. (eds.), *Athenian Political Thought and the Reconstruction of American Democracy* (Ithaca 1994), pp. 103-146; and the comments by Russell Meiggs, *The Athenian Empire* (Oxford and New York 1999), chapter 23.

² See the additional evidence provided in Y. Garlan, ‘War and Peace’, in J.-P. Vernant (ed.), *The Greeks* (Chicago and London 1995), pp. 53-85; and K.A. Raaflaub, ‘Archaic and Classical Greece’, in K. Raaflaub and N. Rosenstein (eds.), *War and Society in the Ancient and Medieval Worlds : Asia, The Mediterranean, Europe, and Mesoamerica* (Cambridge, Mass., and London 1999), pp. 129-162 and ‘Father of All, Destroyer of All : War in Late Fifth-Century Athenian Discourse and Ideology’, in D.R. McCann and B.S. Strauss (eds.), *War and Democracy : A Comparative Study of the Korean War and the Peloponnesian War* (Armonk and London 2001), pp. 307-356.

democratic means. At first, it is true, the impulse of Athens to expand was restrained; and the spread of Athenian power usually went hand in hand with ‘democracy promotion’, the creation and nurturing of democratic ways of life: new architectural forms; public space; a form of government run by citizens for citizens; a legal system that followed the rule that nobody was to be above the laws, and that laws must apply equally to everybody. These inventions undoubtedly proved attractive to others; in various parts of the burgeoning empire, there were times when citizens downtrodden by their local nobility or suffering from *stasis* openly welcomed Athenian intervention and influence in their local affairs. A model example was the rebuilding in 444/443 BCE of the ancient city of Sybaris, which received an influx of settlers, a new layout and a brand new democratic constitution. The trouble was that democracy did not spring naturally from the depths of the Aegean, or the region’s soil, or from the deities or souls of its peoples. The democratic lawgivers sometimes found their subjects to be less than law-abiding. Democratic laws therefore had to be imposed, perhaps by cunning or, if necessary, by means of violence, or so they concluded. But when that happened, Athenian democracy found it increasingly hard to ‘place things in the middle’, as their citizens liked to put it. Athens then came face to face with an ugly possibility: in the name of democracy, and for the sake of holding or expanding its own position, it was sometimes forced (as in 416/415 BCE, during the expedition launched by Athens against the Aegean island of Melos) to set up garrison colonies, to plunder whole cities, even to heap cruelty on those who tried to stand in its way.

Other Democracies

The countless military adventures of Athens showed not only that a domestically peaceful democracy could inflict violence upon its neighbours. It also implied that violence was a double-edged sword for the Athenian democracy. It could become subject to the charge of double standards – and to acts of military reprisal. The heroic survival of the Athenian democracy against its Spartan and Persian enemies had a flip side: by arming to protect itself, by acting as if it had been born into the world to give no rest to either itself or to others, it encouraged its rivals - Philip II of Macedon, for instance - to seek and to win the ultimate prize of drowning Athens in its own blood. The bellicose dynamic within the ancient Greek world has understandably fed recent worries among scholars of democracy who wrestle with the possible conclusion that

democracy is a violent form of polity.¹ But before handing down this verdict and any strategic or normative conclusions that might flow from it we need to pause, to ask whether the variable forms of ancient, assembly-based democracy in the wider Greek world might make a difference to our understanding of the subject of violence and war.

The traces of evidence of scores of democracies in the Hellenic world, some of them much older than that of Athens, should make us think twice about drawing easy conclusions, simply because we do not know a great deal about what the democrats of these other democracies actually thought about war, and how they practised or resisted it. The usual caveats about sources apply with a vengeance to these old political communities: time has ravaged the evidence and few of the jumbled fragments that remain have been blessed with the kind of intensive efforts at archaeological resuscitation that their Athenian equivalents have enjoyed.² [MENTION MOGENS HANSEN] We can nevertheless be sure that the art of self-government by assemblies of people was not an invention of the Athenians. The ancient Greek world knew no single type of assembly-based democracy; outside of Athens there flourished a whole range of different democracies. Often standing in tension with Athens, these democracies showed that the formula (famously defined by Aristotle) that democracy is a unique type of polity in which the *dēmos* is *kyrios* could be applied differently, and in different contexts, with different sets of institutions and – most probably – different understandings of what democracy was all about. In the Greek world, assembly-based democracy was not a single or fixed form: it was more like an odyssey in which different theoretical imaginings and various practical experiments were the norm.

There were altogether some two hundred Greek city states scattered throughout the Mediterranean; up to a half of these had a taste of democracy at one time or another,

¹ See the tentative remarks on ‘the failure to observe much democratic peace in the different conditions of ancient Greece’ in Bruce M. Russett, ‘Democracy, War and Expansion through Historical Lenses’, *European Journal of International Relations*, 15, 9 (2009), p. 22; compare Wolfgang Schuller, ‘Zur Entstehung der griechischen Demokratie auuserhalb Athens’, in *Auf den Weg gebracht: Festschrift Kurt Georg Kiesinger*, edited by Horst Sund and Manfred Timmermann (Konstanz 1979), pp. 433-47.

² See Eric W. Robinson, *The First Democracies. Early Popular Government Outside Athens* (Stuttgart 1997) and the sceptical but cryptic review by Mogens Herman Hansen in *Bryn Mawr Classical Review* 17 (September 1999); and John Keane, *The Life and Death of Democracy* (London and New York 2009), especially pp. 78-107.

some of them well before Athens claimed to be democratic. The details of these early *dēmokratai* may initially seem tedious, but their cumulative effect on our understanding of the subject of war and democracy is potentially strong, and important to absorb. The fragmentary evidence from democracies like Ambracia, Chios, Cyrene and Heraclea Pontica is not always good news for democrats. Sometimes it describes in painful detail the destruction of democratic institutions, either by military conquest, or by violent conspiracies of the rich, or by demagogues or single-minded tyrants, or by all four in some sequence. In each case, there is an important reminder of the utter contingency of democracy – of the ease with which it can be blown away by violence, like a leaf in the autumn winds.

The Greek democracies that operated at a distance from Athens also raise questions about their political compatibility with democracy in imperial form. These other democracies are of special interest, and not just because they highlight the sobering point that ancient democracies were rarely established democratically, and that even when they were born of *resistance* to military interventions and violent power grabbing they often came into being through the exercise of arbitrary power, backed by threatened or actual violence. These other democracies underscore another point: that in matters of democracy war is a wild horse. It is true, paradoxically, that the whole trend towards democratisation in the Greek world was deepened by such events as the outbreak of war in the Peloponnese between Athens and Sparta (431-404 BCE). On the coasts and islands of the Aegean, many members of the vast military coalition under the command of Athens were already, or soon became governed, by democratic rules. That was the deliberate policy of the Athenians, who for the sake of empire building lent a hand to democratic factions wherever they could, in contrast to the Spartan taste for well-ordered oligarchies. The military victory of Sparta nevertheless resulted in a brief period of autocracy in Athens. Early in 411 BCE there was an oligarchic coup after the assembly - its composition distorted by the absence of many poor citizens absent on naval duty, and by organized conspirators wielding the swords of fear and propaganda - voted to abolish itself. The military victory of Sparta meanwhile led to the overthrow of democracy among many of its allies. The return of tyranny in Syracuse around the same time threatened an end to the experiment in self-government throughout the whole region.

War was generally bad for democracy. But thanks to the growing unpopularity of the ruling Council of 400 and a brief flurry of street fighting, Athenian citizens managed to shake off oligarchy and renew their democratic institutions. The Athenian resistance proved not to be exceptional. Threatened with *stasis*, many states in the Aegean also clung on to their democracies. On the mainland, the Argives followed the pattern; so did Sicyon, Phleious, and Thebes. The Arcadian confederation did so as well, at least for some years. During the 360s, it even tried something never before attempted: to form a confederacy structured by the rules of democratic negotiation and compromise. Among the key institutions that the Arcadians invented was a confederal assembly called the *myrioi*.¹ Open to all citizens of the region, it was the first-ever experiment in cross-border or regional democracy. The experiment rested on a working principle that remains as rock-solid today as it did then: in order to survive and flourish, democracies must tame the military and political pressures on their borders. We might even speak of an Arcadian Law: the viability of any democracy is inversely proportional to the quantity of outside ('geopolitical') threats to its existence. That Arcadian Law contained a gloomy corollary: a warning that democracy could be misused to kill off democracy. The Arcadian initiative in cross-border democracy showed not merely that things took place in the Greek world of city states that were not covered by, or were directly at odds with, the Athenian model of democracy. The case of Arcadia suggests that that model had worrying implications for the plurality of democracies of the region – that the Athenian empire was capable of gobbling up democracies in the name of democracy, and that therefore democracies had a strong self-interest in banding together, peacefully, to ensure their political survival, so as to avoid their massacre through rivalry, expansion and armed conflict. Put differently: many citizens within these democracies seem to have grasped just how easily their polities could succumb to events triggered by plots, violent disturbances and military catastrophes. They knew that democracies were constantly vulnerable to what contemporaries called *stasis*, a very broad term used to describe the factional squabbling, outright sedition, open civil war, bloodshed and mass exile that was endemic in a geopolitical system of independent city states that lacked any

¹ Hans Schaefer, 'ΠΟΛΙΣ ΜΥΡΙΑΝΔΡΟΣ', *Historia* (1961), pp. 292-317; James Roy, 'Problems of Democracy in the Arcadian Confederacy 370-362 BC', in Roger Brock and Stephen Hodkinson (eds.), *Alternatives to Athens. Varieties of Political Organization and Community in Ancient Greece* (Oxford 2000), pp. 308-326.

co-ordinating centre and, hence, constantly violated their geographical isolation and political autonomy by sucking them into a vortex of permanent rivalries.¹

Representative Democracy

There are vital lessons to be learned from the other Greek experiments with democracy - including the lesson, in matters of war, that the tight grip of Athens on our democratic imagination needs to be loosened simply because the logic of induction alone forbids any simple-minded conclusions about democracy and bellicosity. The appeal here for greater open-mindedness and sensitivity to context when analysing the relationship between democracy and war is strengthened by turning our attention to more modern times, to the invention of a new historical form of democracy no longer centred on the open-air assembly of sovereign male citizens.

From around the tenth century CE, democracy entered a second historical phase whose centre of gravity was Europe. Shaped by forces as varied as the rebirth of towns, the rise (in northern Spain) of the first parliaments, and the conflicts unleashed by self-governing councils and religious dissent within the Christian Church, democracy came to be understood as *representative democracy*. This at least was the term that began to be used in the Low Countries, France, England and the new American republic during the eighteenth century, for instance by constitution makers and influential political writers when referring to a new type of government with its roots in popular consent. Representative democracy was a novel way of thinking about democracy; it was unintelligible by the standards of Athenian citizens, who even lacked an equivalent word for 'representative' or 'representation'. Other observers (Jean-Jacques Rousseau, for instance) were to denounce the whole idea as oxymoronic, but in practice representative democracy grew in popularity and influence, to become a new form of government in which people, understood as voters faced with a genuine choice between at least two alternatives, are free to elect others who then act in defence of their interests, that is, *represent* them by deciding matters on their behalf.

¹ The meaning of stasis is discussed in J.C. Oates, *Stasis in the Greek World...from the End of the Peloponnesian War to the Death of Alexander the Great*, unpublished dissertation (Cambridge University, Cambridge, 1967); Kathryn A. Morgan (ed.), *Sovereignty and its Discontents in Ancient Greece* (Austin 2003); and Hans-Joachim Gehrke, *Stasis. Untersuchungen zu den inneren Kriegen in den griechischen Staaten des 5. und 4. Jahrhunderts v. Chr.* (Munich 1985), especially part one.

Much ink and blood was to be spilled in defining what exactly representation meant, who was entitled to represent whom and what had to be done when representatives disregarded those whom they were supposed to represent.¹ But common to the second historical phase of democracy was the belief that good government was government by representatives. Often contrasted with monarchy, representative democracy was praised as a way of governing better by openly and *non-violently* airing differences of opinion - not only among the represented themselves, but also between representatives and those whom they are supposed to represent. Representative government was also hailed for encouraging the rotation of leadership guided by merit. It was said to introduce competition for power that in turn enabled elected representatives to test out their political competence before others. It was in effect an effort at internalising the ancient Athenian practice of *ostrakismos*. Some observers were to say that representative democracy would rid politics of fools and knaves, even that it would promote peace among nations. The earliest champions of representative democracy also offered a more pragmatic justification of representation. It was seen as the practical expression of a simple reality: that it wasn't feasible for all of the people to be involved all of the time, even if they were so inclined, in the business of government. Given that reality, the people must delegate the task of government to representatives who are chosen at regular elections. The job of these representatives is to monitor the spending of public money. Representatives make representations on behalf of their constituents to the government and its bureaucracy. Representatives debate issues and make laws. They decide who will govern and how – on behalf and in the name of the people.

As a way of imagining and handling power, representative democracy was an unusual type of political system. Compared with the previous, assembly-based form of the Greek world, it greatly extended the geographic scale of institutions of self-government. As time passed, and despite its localised origins in towns, rural districts and large-scale imperial settings, representative democracy came to be housed mainly within territorial states protected by standing armies and equipped with powers to

¹ See the various contributions to Sonia Alonso, Wolfgang Merkel and John Keane (eds.), *The Future of Representative Democracy* (London and New York 2010) and John Keane, *The Least Worst Form of Government: The Rise and Fall of Representative Democracy* (London and New York 2010).

make and enforce laws and to extract taxes from their subject populations. The new historical form of democracy altered the architecture of politics. Territorially defined governments fed by their control of resources like taxation, law, administration and the means of violence began to wield enormous power over their subjects. These Mortal Gods, as Thomas Hobbes called them, began to shape and re-shape the lives of their subjects. It turned them into taxpayers; objects of law and civil administration; and soldiers and victims of war among states. In modern Europe, representative democracy resembled a plant that grew in the hot house of these territorial states, which were typically much bigger and more populous than the political units of ancient democracy (most states of the Greek world of assembly democracy, Mantinea and Argos for instance, were no bigger than a few score square kilometres). Representative democracy was equally unusual in that it rested upon written constitutions, independent judiciaries and laws that guaranteed procedures that still play vital roles in the democracies of today: inventions like *habeas corpus* (prohibitions upon imprisonment and torture), periodic election of candidates to legislatures, limited-term holding of political offices, voting by secret ballot, referendum and recall, electoral colleges, competitive political parties, ombudsmen, civil society and civil liberties such as the right to assemble in public, and liberty of the press. All these inventions were designed to ensure that in matters of politics the subjects of government would have their heads counted – instead of being chopped off by those who governed.

A Right of National Self-Determination?

The novel system of representative democracy in territorial state form was widely praised as an improvement upon ancient Greek democracy, but the truth is that representative democracy was permanently vulnerable to violent conflict and war fuelled by struggles for national self-determination. Their long-term, self-destructive effects were missed in the famous account of democracy and war presented by the French writer and politician Alexis de Tocqueville (1805-1859). Looking at the case of the young American republic, and peering into the future, Tocqueville imagined – with one qualification – that peace would come to be a general principle of modern democratic life. ‘Fortune, which has conferred so many peculiar benefits upon the inhabitants of the United States, has placed them in the midst of a wilderness, where

they have,' he wrote, 'no neighbours; a few thousand soldiers are sufficient for their wants.'¹ Tocqueville warned that democracies should be permanently watchful of armies, whose officers and other ranks (unlike the armies once led by aristocrats) are gripped by material ambition and therefore tend to be dissatisfied with their lot. They come to see that war is in their self-interest, even though wars and rumours of war eat like an acid at the structures and habits of democratic life. Fortunately, Tocqueville observed, most American citizens understood that war whips up animosity towards others, concentrates the means of administration in a few hands and destroys material infrastructure and wealth. Privileged by geography and committed to the principle of equality, the American democracy thus tended to pacifism. 'The ever increasing numbers of men of property who are lovers of peace, the growth of personal wealth which war so rapidly consumes, the mildness of manners, the gentleness of heart, those tendencies to pity which are produced by the equality of conditions, all these causes concur to quench the military spirit.'²

The assessment proved to be wildly inaccurate. Leaving aside the shameful near-annihilation of native Americans, a vicious civil war driven by two conflicting understandings of American democracy and the subsequent rise of a global American empire, Tocqueville failed to see that the invention and deployment, during the eighteenth century, of the doctrine of the sovereignty of nations proved to be a curse for democracy. The formula was unknown to Greek democrats. It seemed to be simple enough and thoroughly consonant with the ideal of representative democracy: each nation living within a given territory was to be entitled to govern itself through its own governmental institutions. There were manifold troubles with this doctrine. Not all people defined themselves primarily or exclusively as members of a 'nation'; the doctrine implied that they should be encouraged or forced to do so. Nations in any case did not release their passions or procreate or live separately from others, in discrete territorial frameworks; lust, pregnancy and childbirth were great scramblers of national identities and state boundaries. The call for 'national self-determination' thus implied the compulsory demarcation and 'cleansing' of nations from lands where they were said not to belong. This further implied, as a last resort, murder and

¹ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* volume 2, chapter XXII, p. 279.

² Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* volume 2, chapter XXII, p. 279.

violence. And since self-determining nations living in territorial states resembled atoms without a gravitational force to hold them together, jostling and elbowing and outright fisticuffs were by implication permanent probabilities. The 'democratic' doctrine of national self-determination implied not just bickering, diplomacy and negotiation. Something worse was implied: sabre-rattling, demagoguery and brinkmanship leading to declarations of war. On the eve of World War I, Prince von Bulow, who had directed German policy as Imperial Chancellor from 1900 to 1909, put the point chillingly: 'If it were possible for members of different nationalities, with different language and customs, and an intellectual life of a different kind, to live side by side in one and the same state, without succumbing to the temptation of each trying to force his own nationality on the other, things on earth would look a good deal more peaceful', he said. He added: 'But it is a law of life and development in history that where two national civilisations meet they fight for ascendancy. In the struggle between nationalities one nation is the hammer and the other the anvil; one is the victor and the other the vanquished.'¹

French events

The new democratic formula of national self-determination was undoubtedly revolutionary. It had incendiary effects, in the form of major disturbances in the Low Countries, as well as in other hot spots of Europe, for instance in Switzerland and Ireland. But the formula had its greatest triumph in the French Revolution. An earthquake that sent shock waves throughout Europe, and far beyond, for instance throughout Spanish America, the spectacular events of 1789 introduced Europeans and the rest of the world to the representative-democratic idea that government could be 'for the people' and 'by the nation'. Four years into the Revolution, Robespierre's five-minute speech on Virtue and Terror in the Convention on February 5, 1794 registered the pulse of events, and the link between representative democracy and nation states. 'Democracy', he thundered, 'is a state in which the people, as sovereign guided by laws of its own making, does for itself all that it can do well, and by its delegates what it cannot...Democracy is the only form of state which all the individuals composing it can truly call their country.' Robespierre went on to make a

¹ Prince Bernhard von Bülow, *Imperial Germany* (London 1914), pp. 245-6.

prediction - one that proved as inaccurate as it was supercilious. 'The French are the first people in the world to establish a true democracy, by calling all men to enjoy equality and the fullness of civil rights; and that, in my opinion is the real reason why all the tyrants allied against the Republic will be defeated.'¹

Robespierre's boast played to the high drama of the moment, but it was to be spoiled and in some circles discredited by its association with the practice of terror and war. With one leg in the Convention and the other firmly planted in the revolutionary clubs and cells of Paris, Robespierre clambered to the summit of power by presenting himself as the great reconciler of direct and representative democracy. He was 'the people'.² Robespierre turned out to be the first democratic dictator of modern times. Partly through luck, but partly through his own calculations and tactical prowess, he positioned himself to play the role of master within a political void. The symbol and stage director of the Jacobin rule that culminated (from June 2, 1793) in the expulsion of the Girondins from the Convention, a purge soon magnified into the Terror, Robespierre saw himself as the great champion of modern democratic progress. He sealed an alliance between the popular *sans culotte* movement and the most radical segments of the middle class, and moved quickly to root out all dissent. He was obsessed with unanimity, which he considered a prime revolutionary virtue. He thought and acted like a fanatic, an obsessive who believed that the leading role of 'the people' and the 'general will' necessitated not only the provision of radically new policies like public education, poor relief and the universal suffrage, but also the rooting out of 'faction' and 'particular interest' - through force of arms, whenever necessary.

It was partly because of the bellicosity of the Revolution that great excitement in favour of democracy quickly spread through parts of Europe. The extent of foreign support for its ideals has often been exaggerated; great care needs to be taken when trying to assess the impact of the Revolution on democratic ideals and institutions. Contemporaries sympathetic to the Revolution, especially intellectuals, typically thought of it as an epochal moment, as a clean break with the corrupted past, as a giant leap upwards, into the air, onto a higher historical plane. That reaction was

¹ Maximilien Robespierre, *Discours et rapports à la Convention* (Paris 1965), pp. 213ff.

² François Furet, *Marx et la Révolution française* (Paris 1986), p. 86

especially strong within the German lands, where philosophers like Immanuel Kant thought, in rather cosmopolitan but ethereal terms, of the Revolution as something like a metaphysical fact of relevance for the whole world. The revolutionaries' own denunciations of despotism added to the headiness. People living under oppressive regimes, anywhere in Europe or in the rest of the world, were in effect invited to take matters into their own hands. Kings and clerics were warned. Insurrection for the sake of democratic liberty was no longer a crime: the right of all peoples to act to regenerate themselves was a universal right.

In retrospect, it is unclear exactly who were supposed to be, or in fact were, the addressees of such heady principles. In 1789, illiterate peasants still comprised the big majority of Europe's population. In the central-eastern half of the continent, there were few cities, limited trade and commerce and a weakly developed, educated middle class. Besides, those who ruled Europe's populations through states and empires - including so-called 'enlightened despots' - had little interest in allowing the spirit of democratic liberty to flourish, as it had done in France and Britain and the Low Countries through the subterranean development of printing presses, reading circles, clubs and *salles de lecture*. Crackdowns flourished, as in Russia, where Catherine the Great (1729-1796) revealed her true reactionary instincts by spying on, arresting and imprisoning her democratic opponents.

The combined effect of these barriers to the spread of revolutionary ideals was to increase the temptations of the French authorities to resort to military force, in the name of representative democracy. So history repeated itself - the imperial democracy of Athens versus neighbouring Melos - this time on a continental scale.¹ Democratic liberty was not negotiable. Its lofty ideals quickly gave way to talk of *pays ennemis* and *pays conquis*. Democracy went on the march, in uniform, caught up in the

¹ The following section draws upon Suzanne Tassier, *Histoire de la Belgique sous l'occupation française en 1792 et 1793* (Brussels 1934); Simon Schama, *Patriots and Liberators : Revolution in the Netherlands, 1780-1813* (New York 1977); Alfred Rufer, *La Suisse et la Révolution française* (Paris 1974); T.C.W. Blanning, *The French Revolution in Germany : Occupation and Resistance in the Rhineland, 1792-1802* (Oxford 1983); Stuart Woolf, *A History of Italy, 1700-1860 : The Social Constraints of Political Change* (London 1979); and *Occupants-occupés, 1792-1815 : Colloque de Bruxelles, 29 et 30 Janvier 1968* (Brussels 1968); and Jacques Droz, *L'Allemagne et la Révolution française* (Paris 1949). The following thoughts on the long-term impact of the rise and fall of the French democratic empire are elaborated in *The Life and Death of Democracy* (London and New York 2009), pp. 455-581.

practical imperatives of conquest and occupation. Annexation in the name of democratic ideals was either carried out through the signing of a treaty (as happened in the Rhineland) or territory was simply annexed and sub-divided into arbitrarily defined, French-style departments, without consultation, as took place in Belgium in 1795 and Piedmont in 1802. It is true that there were places, like the Batavian Republic and the Helvetic Republic, where the Napoleonic armies claimed that the birth of a sister republic was the work of its most 'advanced' patriots. But in every case, French control over territory, resources and people was the primary imperative. National self-determination by citizens was arranged on French terms. Democratic constitutions designed to bring order and guarantee certain basic freedoms – subject to strong executive authority and a limited property franchise, *a la française* - were imposed. Administrative systems based on departments and districts, cantons and communes were put in place. A local press sympathetic to French orthodoxy was cultivated. Property systems based on seigneurialism were broken up; every effort was made to dissolve the power of the Catholic faith.

Whatever locals thought of these reforms was largely irrelevant, for the fundamental point was that all the democratic reforms were imposed by conquest, not formulated or accepted through consent. Especially after 1793, when the French expanded its military campaign and found itself at war with most of monarchical Europe, the logic of brute conquest prevailed. In practice, the revolutionary slogan '*Guerre aux châteaux, paix aux chaumières*' ('War on castles, peace to cottages') meant what the Committee of Public Safety meant when (on September 18th 1793) it instructed the commanders of French armies to live off the land and its people, to 'procure, as far as possible from enemy territory, the supplies necessary to provision the army, as well as arms, clothing, equipment, and transport.' *Commissaires militaires* were charged with extracting taxes and supplies on the spot. Huge sums were expected, and without delay. It was not long before the search for military resources became the prime purpose of occupation, as when the revolutionaries marched in to northern Italy for the purpose of providing a new granary for the French armies and new funding to help pay off the costs of war. Civilians were seen as fair game and officers, knowing the unreliability of food convoys, turned a blind eye to the bad behaviour of their troops, despite the grave risks of military indiscipline. The people's army bit into the flesh of the peoples they occupied. In the name of ballots, they billeted themselves using

bullets. Horses and cattle were rounded up and fields were stripped to feed starving battalions. Troops smashed their way into homes, where they helped themselves to money, bedding, clothing, wine, food, and kitchen utensils. There was drunken abuse, wanton vandalism and beating and rape of those who stood in their way.

Few troops were ever brought to justice and little gratitude ever flowed from the conquered. Countless Italians, Belgians, Spanish and Rhinelanders understandably saw the conquest with the eyes of conquered people: they saw equality bathed in misery, fear and poverty, but no liberty or fraternity. The sheer size of the French armies, plus their youth and hunger and military inexperience, spread fear and stirred up national resentments among the local communities through which they passed. The French effort to sow the seeds of democratic revolution by military force and influence faltered. It certainly altered boundaries and changed institutions. But it largely failed to win minds, let alone hearts. It bred resentment and resistance and the consequence, not surprisingly, was that the whole trend towards democratisation (a neologism of this period) stalled. It was as if history had taken a strong dislike to representative democracy. War in its name promoted petty tyranny or authoritarianism, as well as clampdowns on press freedom, public assembly and other civil freedoms. War gave democracy a bad name, as can be seen in almost all satirical cartoons of the period. At the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815, not one government in the whole of Europe could be described as democratic – if by that we mean, as was meant at the time, a civilian government of representatives subject to openly contested elections and voting by adult males.

Overkill

The French events revealed how representative democracy could degenerate into violently ‘democratic’ despotisms that proved menacing to more than just their subjects at home. As with democracy in the ancient Greek world, modern representative government had both ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ dimensions, which implied that political manipulation at home could be enhanced by dalliances and skulduggery abroad. So the neighbouring citizens of states were potential victims of outside manipulation, fear and outbreaks of war. This was not simply a French problem. From the time of the French Revolution, all representative governments found themselves in

the devil's company of geopolitics. The question confronting these democracies was whether elected government that paid lip service to 'the people' could be combined with a system of armed territorial states that acted as if they were 'sovereign' powers, and whose leaders knew well that just as nature abhors a vacuum so state politics moves to fill gaps and to take advantage of opportunities. During the course of the nineteenth century, the combination produced unhappy results that resulted eventually in the first-ever global war. In the absence of the European Union and other viable cross-border peace-making mechanisms that were later to be built on the ruins of representative democracy, European experience during the age of representative government confirmed that a system of squabbling, nominally sovereign states bristling with arms was prone constantly to war, and to rumours of war. It proved as well that war was the crucible within which unaccountable rulers muster intrigue and machination to embark upon military adventures by mobilising 'the people' - in order better to pulverise them.

It is important to note that the geopolitical instability in which representative democracies were born coincided with major transformations of the mode and means of warfare. Those transformations, like the military innovations of Athenian democracy examined in this volume by Iain Spence, Matthew Trundle and others, suggest a more general rule: each major historical phase of democracy has been linked with a radical transformation of the mode and means of fighting war. The imperial democracy of Athens coincided with the hoplite revolution on land and the massive expansion of trireme power at sea. The struggle for representative democracy - symbolised by Cromwell's Ironsides and the people's armies of the Napoleonic era - coincided with the organisation of machine-like mass armies equipped with swords and muskets and great killing power, together with canon-firing warships capable of all-devouring confrontations on the high seas, in which the aim was skilfully to destroy one's opponents and their equipment completely. The widespread implosion of representative democracies in the first decades of the twentieth century coincided with the 'perfection' of these military trends, their mutation into something that had never before happened: the invention of 'overkill' weapons systems capable of exterminating the entire human species.

All weapons of violence tend towards overkill, of course. From the beginning, the weapons invented by humans - the rock, spear, javelin, dart, arrow - bestowed a form of power to produce effects out of all proportion to the means employed. That power transformed hominids into humans by enabling them to become the first sizeable creatures on earth to effect change by committing acts of violence at a distance - and so surviving and exploiting even the largest land animals. Humans became what they threw. The arts of manipulating fire and the later means of killing at a distance - the crossbow, the trebuchet, Greek fire - greatly added to the stock of human powers of violence. The invention of gunpowder, by the Chinese, at the end of the first millennium BCE, facilitated the rise of the so-called gunpowder empires, such as those of the Ottomans, Russians and Mughals.¹ The subsequent harnessing of gunpowder for far more destructive ends - the development of weapons with a potentially global reach - brought human beings into contact, for the first time, with the possibility of *total war* that turned any point on the planet into a battle front, resulting in large-scale death. Mechanized total war was a European invention of the late eighteenth century, but it only reached perfection - and the height of self-contradiction - during the long twentieth century of violence, in exactly the same period that the species of representative democracy tottered on the edge of extinction, at all four corners of the earth.

The frightening development of techniques of *overkill* - the military capacity to overwhelm *all* institutions of government and civil society and to reduce to zero their power of securing their subjects' lives against the ravages of violence - was compounded by the invention and use of means of war such as chemical weapons, motorised tanks, land mines and concentration camps. These are now well-known ugly facts of contemporary life, but less well understood are four key military developments unique to the last half-century that arguably changed everything in matters of war and democracy: American B-29s in 1945 unloading comprehensive destruction from the unprecedented height of 20,000 feet; the counter-detonation by the Russians of their first atomic bomb in 1949; the Americans' deployment in 1956 of B-52 intercontinental bombers capable of flying round trips to Moscow; and the development, by the early 1960s, of intercontinental ballistic missiles capable of

¹ An excellent short survey of the history of weaponry is to be found in Alfred W. Crosby, *Throwing Fire: Projectile Technology Through History* (Cambridge and New York 2002).

reaching their far-flung targets within half-an-hour. The net effect of these and other potentially barbarous military inventions has been to draw the populations of actually existing democracies into a global ‘triangle of violence’ - a point explained at length in my *Violence and Democracy*¹ - in which the military security of democracies has come to depend in part upon a ‘bad conscience’ about past wars of total destruction by weapons that continue to have an overkill capacity.

Democratic Peace?

The fact that overkill is today an *ultimate* problem, not just for democracies grappling with the task of democratising violence, but for the whole of the planet, stems from the widespread realisation that the new technologies of warfare have the potential to annihilate many millions of people, perhaps even to exterminate *homo sapiens* itself. We have been catapulted, say, from the early nineteenth-century world of representative democracy and Colonel Shrapnel testing his deadly new fragmenting shell on the wildlife of Foulness Island, into a world in which weapons of war potentially render (certain forms of) war obsolete, simply because human beings could no longer survive their devastating effects.

It is against the backdrop of this contradictory development that democracy, as understood by our grandparents, is undergoing profound changes. Reshaped from all sides by new institutions, civic initiatives and political pressures, democracy has entered a third historical era. The emerging era of ‘monitory democracy’, which dates roughly from the mid-twentieth century, was born of the experience of overkill and total war, including the crushing military defeat of German and Japanese fascism, the beginnings of de-colonization and the post-war reconstruction of Europe and Japan.² The global experience of total war, and of military victory and military defeat, helped push the language and institutions and ‘spirit’ of democracy into a new epoch, in which democracy continues to mean (as in Athens) nothing less than a form of self-government based (as in the era of representative democracy) on free and fair elections, but something much more: the continuous public scrutiny or monitoring of

¹ See my *Violence and Democracy* (Cambridge and New York 2004), p. 182.

² The rise of monitory democracy is examined at length in *The Life and Death of Democracy* (London and New York 2009), part three.

power by extra-parliamentary mechanisms that target both governmental and non-governmental organisations, at home and abroad. Once seen as given by the grace of a deity, or as grounded in First Principles such as the Nation or God, democracy comes to be viewed much more pragmatically, as a vital weapon for use against dangerous concentrations of unaccountable power, wherever they exist. In the era of monitory democracy, the word democracy means: the non-violent public accountability and public control of decision makers, whether they operate in the field of state or interstate institutions or within so-called non-governmental or civil society organisations, such as businesses, trade unions, sports associations, human rights networks and charities.

The age of monitory democracy is uniquely sensitive to outbreaks of war and violence. Most of today's democracies have a declining appetite for bellicosity. Their citizens often feel horror and disgust at the psychic traumas, damaged tissues of sociability and ecological and infrastructural damage inflicted by the senseless sanctification of cruelty and violence. Decisions by governments to go to war, for instance, are typically met with doubt, anguish and public disturbance, as can be seen whenever democratically elected governments are confronted with the dilemma of whether or not to intervene to put a stop to cruelty and killing in uncivil war zones. If democratic governments stand back and do nothing (as happened initially in Timor Leste) then they are accused of contradicting their own standards of self-government without violence; but if they intervene militarily to put a stop to wanton violence (as when Indian troops entered Bangladesh) then they are accused of exactly the same contradiction. Efforts to resolve the dilemma typically fuel public controversy, as do all other types of military intervention and operation.

Why is there a hypersensitivity to war and other forms of violence? When compared with the Greek model of assembly democracy and the modern European age of representative democracy, why does violence become a sizeable fishbone in the throat of many democrats? One answer is that life within monitory democracies is shaped by the advent of many new violence-scrutinising mechanisms. Examples include the growth of peace movements rooted in civil society, disarmament initiatives, global summits and war crimes tribunals; the list also includes truth and reconciliation commissions, campaigns against torture, outcries against violence targeted at women

and children, human rights networks and experiments (the European Union and its Copenhagen criteria is the leading case) in crafting power-sharing institutions that criss-cross and complicate the borders of states and their 'sovereign' military powers. All these monitory inventions - symbolised in many people's minds by such bodies as Amnesty International, Médecins Sans Frontières and Reporters without Borders - remind citizens and representatives of the frightful things happening around them and, in so doing, they underscore the dilemmas and threats posed by 'overkill' weapons, war and violence for the ideals and institutions of publicly accountable, power-sharing ways of life.

The sensed discomfort with war and its toxic effects is amplified by stories and images and sounds circulated by a globally interdependent system of communication media. But the discomfort is equally reinforced by the return of an old problem that has twice before haunted democracy: the temporary ascendancy of a democratic empire, this time in the form of the United States, the world's first-ever democracy to operate as a (potentially) bellicose dominant power in global form. Its post-1945 commitment to securing 'global order' in the name of 'democracy' as a way of life suited to all peoples of the earth is arguably proving a mixed blessing for monitory democracy, as can be seen by carefully scrutinising a favourite recent conjecture of American presidents, government officials, journalists and academics: the credo that democracies like the United States are reliable lovers of peace. 'During the Cold War,' stated President Bill Clinton, shortly after the final collapse of the Soviet Union, 'we fought to contain a threat to the survival of free institutions. Now we seek to enlarge the circle of nations that live under those free institutions, for our dream is that of a day when the opinions and energies of every person in the world will be given full expression in a world of thriving democracies that cooperate with each other and live in peace.'¹ The conjecture was soon turned by academics into what can be called a Law of Democratic Peace. 'Democracies never go to war' was the boldest

¹ President Bill Clinton, September 27, 1993, cited in Tony Smith, *America's Mission. The United States and the Worldwide Struggle for Democracy in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton 1994), p. 311. The same point was repeated in President Clinton's 1994 State of the Union address: 'Ultimately, the best strategy to ensure our security and to build a durable peace is to support the advance of democracy elsewhere. Democracies don't attack each other, they make better trading partners and partners in diplomacy' (www.pub.whitehouse.gov/urires/12R?urn:pdi://oma.eop.gov.us/1994/1/26/1.text.1)

version. ‘Democracies almost never go to war with each other’ was the more modest rendition.¹

The conjecture has proven faulty, for a string of reasons. The destructive assault of Israel on Lebanon in the so-called July War of 2006 showed that under circumstances of regional or global tension highly-armed democracies can readily work themselves into a fearful frenzy, then project their anxieties onto their neighbours, by force of arms, with hugely destructive effects on the lives of citizens, infrastructure and the surrounding ecosystem.² There is also the sobering point - documented rather poorly, often using questionable definitions and methods - that representative and monitory democracies, despite the more general trend towards the democratisation of violence, have left more than a few victims in their wake because they regularly pick fights and start wars, often in disputed circumstances, using trumped up charges and claims that many voters may swallow, at least for a time.³

The champions of the Law of Democratic Peace have overstated the case for the democratisation of violence thesis; in effect, they have turned it into an awkward dogma. They have meanwhile found to their embarrassment that their overstated ‘scientific’ propositions were easily used against them, as in the build-up to the 2003 American invasion of Iraq. If it is true that democracies love peace, some elected political leaders reasoned, then that is more than enough justification for launching war on designated enemies, so as to transform them into democracies that would in turn shore up democratic peace with their neighbours.⁴ The Law of Democratic Peace

¹ The quantity of literature produced by such claims is vast, but notably includes Michael Doyle, ‘Kant, Liberal Legacies and Foreign Affairs’, *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 12 3-4 (1983), pp. 205-235, 323-353; Bruce Russett, ‘Bushwhacking the Democratic Peace’, *International Studies Perspectives* 6 (2005), p. 395; and F. Chernoff, ‘The Study of Democratic Peace and Progress in International Relations’, *International Studies Review* 6 (2004), pp. 49-78.

² Samir Khalaf, ‘The July War on Lebanon’, *Conflict in Focus* 14-15 (December 2006), pp. 7-9.

³ Compare Melvin Small and J. David Singer, ‘The war-proneness of democratic regimes’, *Jerusalem Journal of International Studies*, 1, 4 (1976), pp. 50-69, where it is claimed that between 1816 and 1965, 58 per cent of inter-state wars were provoked by democracies – wars being defined as violent conflicts claiming at least 1,000 lives. The claim is unconvincing, if only because democracies are defined (poorly) as regimes in which just 10 per cent of the population are enfranchised. Compare Harald Mueller, ‘The Antinomy of Democratic Peace’, *International Politics* 41 (2004), pp. 494-520, where ‘pacifist democracies’ willing to co-operate with dictatorships are contrasted with ‘militant democracies’ that are fundamentally hostile to such regimes.

⁴ See the confession of Bruce Russett, ‘Bushwhacking the Democratic Peace’, *International Studies Perspectives*, 6 (2005), pp. 395-408: ‘Many advocates of the democratic peace may now feel rather like many atomic scientists did in 1945. They had created something intended to prevent conquest by Nazi

has found itself in a topsy-turvy world where the blind worship of electoral democracy – demolatry, let us call it - passed for democracy, and democracy itself is tarred with the brush of war. In these circumstances, even the parallel claim that ‘democracies win wars’ has found itself struggling to stay afloat. ‘Since 1815,’ write the two best-known champions of this view, ‘democracies have won more than three quarters of the wars in which they have participated.’ They added: ‘This is cause for cheer among democrats. It would appear that democratic nations not only might enjoy the good life of peace, prosperity, and freedom; they can also defend themselves against outside threats from tyrants and despots.’¹

Even by this reckoning, democracies lose up to a quarter of the wars they fight, which proves to be cold comfort, especially in those bungled military conflicts - Vietnam and Iraq and Afghanistan are examples - where not only the global reputation of the United States has been put on trial, but democracy itself has been forced to suffer a measure of disgrace. The probability of democratic disgrace has been bolstered by the vulnerability of American-style methods of fighting to so-called ‘asymmetric’ wars.² In plain speech: destructive precision-guided weapons dropped from the skies are usually no match for the methods practised by rag-tag guerrillas and tightly-disciplined, carefully decentralised armies enjoying strong local support nurtured by local feelings that American-style military interventions are shameful. The disproportion between the limited casualties suffered by the military invaders and the terrifying violence heaped upon civilian victims is staggering; so high are the levels of self-protection of the invading armies that their violence is felt by observers and victims alike to have a ‘terrorist’ quality about it. With their unusually high sensitivity to casualties, monitory democracies have found it increasingly hard to ‘win’ asymmetric conflicts. True, there are plenty of occasions when democracies make better choices of military strategy; and it is often true (this was not what Tocqueville thought) that ‘democratic soldiers fight with better leadership and greater initiative’.³

Germany, but only after Germany was defeated was the bomb tested and then used - against Japanese civilians whose government was already near defeat. Our creation too has been perverted.’

¹ Dan Reiter and Allan C. Stam, *Democracies at War* (Princeton and Oxford 2002), p. 2.

² The discussion of forms of warfare in which the weaker combatant uses unconventional strategies and weapons to offset the advantages of the stronger combatant owes much to the seminal essay by Andrew J.R. Mack, ‘Why Big Nations Lose Small Wars: The Politics of Asymmetric Conflict’, *World Politics*, 27, 2 (January 1975), pp. 175–200.

³ Dan Reiter and Allan C. Stam, *Democracies at War* (Princeton and Oxford 2002), p. 198; cf. Alexis de Tocqueville’s remark that ‘in the control of society’s foreign affairs democratic governments do

But it is equally the case that monitory democracies are under constant domestic pressure to make wars short. Publics are understandably intolerant of their own casualties; monitory democracies show signs of ‘democratising’ violence, minimally by meting out electoral punishment to governments who became embroiled in foolhardy or risky or prolonged wars.¹ Doubting the necessity or wisdom of taking and destroying lives, many citizens do not suffer fools gladly and are therefore prone to express impatience with their representatives when results are not forthcoming. That is another reason why the imperial American democracy is more and more forced to settle for draws, or to suffer humiliating losses dressed up as victories.

The reputation of both the American empire and its democratic ideals has not been helped by wars carried out in the name of promoting democracy. Most such ‘fight them, beat them, teach them to be less autocratic, perhaps even democratic’ wars have proven to be fraught, or outright failures - in about 85% of cases, according to one report that examined ninety American military interventions from 1898 to 1992. Another study, covering 228 United States military operations stretching from forcible interventions to peacekeeping, border control and military training, showed that just 28% became more democratic.² The earliest military interventions in the former Spanish empire set the trend towards self-contradiction, which in our times shows no signs of abating.³ The poor record of success of democracy at the point of bayonets, and under the flight paths of drone bombers, does not at all prove that democracy is suited only to a few lucky peoples, so that the building of democracy remains an impossibly daunting ‘leap in the dark’, as Lord Derby famously claimed to Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli in the 1860s. The mixed record of success rather highlights the point that in the age of monitory democracy successful ‘democracy promotion’ is always and everywhere subject to the most stringent conditions. Self-government requires the creation or preservation of a functioning government – not necessarily a territorial state but, minimally, a set of political institutions capable of

appear decidedly inferior to others’ (*Democracy in America*, edited J.P. Mayer [Garden City, New York, 1969], p. 228).

¹ This is a basic point developed in John Keane, *Violence and Democracy* (Cambridge and New York 2004).

² Mark Peceny, *Democracy at the Point of Bayonets* (University Park, Pennsylvania, 1999); John A. Tures, ‘Operation Exporting Freedom: The Quest for Democratization via United States Military Operations’, *Whitehead Journal of Diplomacy and International Relations* 6 (2005), pp. 97-111.

³ See the pathbreaking study by Tony Smith, *America’s Mission: The United States and the Worldwide Struggle for Democracy in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, N.J., 1994).

exercising authority over a territory, making and executing policies, extracting and distributing revenue, producing public goods, and of course protecting its citizens by wielding an effective monopoly over the means of violence. The contradiction between the promise of self-government and the reality of forcible occupation by an invading democratic power such as the United States has to be handled sensitively; the military power to force others into submission does not translate spontaneously into the power of the conquered survivors to form stable democratic governments and law-enforced civil societies. Self-government minimally requires, for instance, a form of ‘trusteeship’ or ‘shared sovereignty’ managed by multilateral institutions that help produce a viable, wider regional settlement. The contradiction can be resolved, or dampened, by following a clear timetable for withdrawal, cultivated wherever possible by the institutions of a civil society, including functioning markets, and - as if the list of preconditions is not already long enough - real efforts to cultivate local trust, not only through respect for local traditions and political aspirations, but especially by enabling the occupied population to organise and speak out against the occupiers, to subject them to the mechanisms of monitory democracy.¹

Future Research

Whether or not monitory democracies, including the United States, can sustain the process of democratising violence in the face of such complexities, or more generally survive territorial state rivalries and the unprecedented forms of ‘overkill’ and ‘asymmetric’ violence of our time, remains an open question. Things will very much depend upon the ability of citizens and their representatives to handle wisely problems of war and violence for which there are no precedents, and no easy solutions – new problems that include the destabilising effects of the American empire and the new ‘triangle of violence’ that includes planetary outbreaks of uncivil wars, nuclear anarchy and ‘asymmetric’ terrorist attacks. In attempting to defuse and wind down

¹ Among the more important research in this area is Karl Deutsch, *Political Community and the North Atlantic Area: International Organization in the Light of Historical Experience* (Princeton 1957); John Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order after Major Wars* (Princeton, N.J., 2001); Simon Chesterman, *You, the People: The United Nations, Transitional Administration, and State-Building* (Oxford 2004); and the revealing summary of the early débâcles that resulted from the American invasion of Iraq in March 2003, an account written by a former advisor to the administration of George W. Bush, Larry Diamond, ‘Promoting Democracy in Post-Conflict and Failed States: Lessons and Challenges’, *Taiwan Journal of Democracy*, volume 2, 2 (December 2006), pp. 93-116.

such threats, using the institutions of monitory democracy, can anything be learned about the subject of war and democracy by revisiting the case of Athenian democracy? Most certainly there is much to be absorbed, but with several important qualifications.

As Josiah Ober and others point out in this volume, the case of Athens shows that from the beginning democracy, considered as a form of self-government founded upon the equality of its citizens, contained within it uniquely important mechanisms for calling into question the blind worship of war and other forms of violence. In the absence of civil society, political parties, periodic elections and monitory bodies in the contemporary sense, the Athenians nevertheless experimented with many different ways of publicly checking and balancing exercises of power. Public officials were subject to scrutiny (*dokimasia*) before taking up office, for instance. They had to lodge regular reports on their activities; under pain of prosecution, their conduct was subject to review; and, in sessions of the assembly, citizens were entitled to lodge complaints (*probole*) against public officials for their wilful manipulation of people, their failure to deliver their promises, or their misbehaviour at public festivals. The Athenians bequeathed to the democratic tradition the principle that open scrutiny or public accountability mechanisms enable actors, citizens and elected leaders alike, to handle intelligently and prudently apply the means of violence, for instance in self-defence or in opposition to rampant cruelty directed against others. But in matters of war, the case of Athens implies, democracy is potentially much more than the art of knowledge gathering, ‘good counsel’ (*euboulia*), tactical agility and prudence, in a word, pragmatism. Its self-questioning dynamics nurture what no other type of polity can achieve: a process that I have called the ‘denaturing’ or ‘democratisation’ of war and other forms of organised violence, which become publicly questionable and potentially eradicable means of resolving disputes and making gains.

So, at a minimum, what can be learned from the case of Athens is that democracy is not ‘naturally’ bellicose. Its heart is not necessarily violent. Yet less positive things are to be learned from the case of Athens. For a start, careful examination of the Athenian democracy casts serious doubt on the recently fashionable proposition that democracies are ‘naturally’ peaceful. The case of Athens shows in particular that transitions to democracy can feed and be fed by war and rumours of war, and that in

extreme cases democratic polities can morph into empires, that is, dominant and dominating powers that prove dangerous for the ideals and institutional legitimacy and effectiveness of democracy. When democracies – Athens, revolutionary France, the United States of America are the three known historical cases – transform themselves into big powers bent on expansion they risk more than just the hubris that comes with the militarisation of their domestic politics. When they become mixed up with inter-state rivalries and cavort with the devils of war, as they are prone to do, imperial democracies encourage enemies, who are typically forced to protect themselves against the double standards of a democracy that by its actions contradicts the language of equality and peaceful self-determination of citizens.

In the age of overkill and asymmetric warfare, surely the double realisation that democracies are uniquely capable of calling into question so-called military and security imperatives just as much as they can stir up geopolitical trouble and stoke the fearful fires of war is an invaluable Greek gift to all thinking students of democracy?