

# **Despots, Democrats and the Determinants of International Conflict**

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# Foreword

Just over two centuries have passed since Emmanuel Kant's *Perpetual Peace* enunciated a rationale for different propensities to belligerency in what may today be loosely called 'democratic' and 'despotic' regimes. Since then, this proposed divergence in behavioural tendencies has, whether explicitly or implicitly, occupied and influenced the thoughts – and deeds – of statesmen and soldiers, and of scholars and spies. This has been particularly true in the twentieth century. Over the last six decades, in the great ideological struggles between liberal democracy and the doctrines of tyranny, national socialism and totalitarian communism, various derivatives of this Kantian perception have been evident in the pronouncements and policies of leaders of the major democracies, from Winston Churchill to Ronald Reagan.

Not always has this rationale inherent in Kant's *caveat* that despots may initiate war 'for the most trivial of reasons' been adopted as a prescription for political action. Despite this, democracies triumphed over their antagonists, which would seem to imply that compliance with such rationale is not a prerequisite for successful policy. However, although generalizations are always risky, what does appear to emerge is that, when democracies have so complied, the cost of their triumph has been considerably less traumatic and costly. Thus whenever free societies have chosen to disregard the inherently aggressive potential of totalitarian ones, as for example in the attempts at appeasement of tyranny in the 1930s, they have paid dearly. Whenever they have confronted such potential aggression with resolute firmness, such as in the 1962 Cuban crisis, it seems that disaster was averted.

These features of global conflicts appear to be reflected in regional contexts as well. Indeed the experience of my own country, Israel, would seem to illustrate the point well. The decisive action undertaken in June 1967, and the resultant consequences, could scarcely be contrasted more starkly than with the hesitant indecision – and its consequences – of October 1973.

The title of this volume *Despots, Democrats and the Determinants of International Conflict*, aptly diagnoses the predicament which has been endemic to Israel's situation since its inception. For, as a country founded on liberal principles, she has been locked in conflict – and combat – with largely illiberal regimes. There may therefore be lessons of general relevance to be learnt from her experience – both success and mistakes. This may particularly be true for a world, which for the third time this century, seems poised on the brink of a major ideological clash between a creed of despotism and liberal democracy. For the burgeoning phenomenon of Islamic fundamentalism appears no less ominous or inimical to values, individual liberties and political pluralism than were those of national socialism or Soviet bolshevism.

I have spend most of my waking hours over the last three decades as a participant in a conflict which in essence has been devoted to securing such democratic values against the onslaught of despotic regimes. Throughout this time, I have always been convinced of the need for active collaboration between the academic world and the more practical fields of intelligence assessment, strategic planning and policy formulation. This is something which I promoted vigorously during my years of active service and continue to do so after my retirement. I therefore warmly welcome this effort by Dr Sherman, whose path and mine have crossed at various intervals in the past twenty years. Although he has broached the subject in a highly theoretical manner, purposefully detached from any particular empirical context, it is perhaps precisely this which in the final analysis may afford it greater practical relevance. In his ambitious endeavour to fashion general principles using a deductive scientific methodology, uncommon in most of the current work in political science and international relations, he aspires to impart to his conclusions a wide-ranging validity, independent of case-specific characteristics. Indeed, there is much reminiscent of economic theory in his ideal-type model-building approach. The fact that such theoretical constructs in economics have become the undisputed foundation for practical economic policy seems to indicate that the attempt to adapt this methodological technique to the sphere of politics (which after all, like economics, is also an allocative discipline) may

have intriguing possibilities – on both theoretical and practical levels.

I have little doubt that not all will agree with Dr Sherman's treatment of the topic, either with regard to his methodological approach or to his substantive conclusions. From my past acquaintance with him, I can testify that he has never sought conformity or consensus. There can, however, also be little doubt that his ideas are challenging, provocative and carefully argued. Indeed, the very controversy they may stimulate is perhaps among their greatest merits. For they raise questions of substance as to the conceptual validity (or at least readdress such validity) of several major tenets of international relations, policy assessment and deterrence.

I am confident, therefore, that there is much of interest and value in this book for all those involved in the field of international politics – whether in academic research or in more practical aspects of influencing, assessing and predicting the conduct of states in their international environment. Whatever the disagreement it may arouse, this is work which treats an issue of crucial and perennial importance in a novel and thought-provoking fashion. For this alone it is worthy of note – and praise.

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