

Democracy, Demonization and the Crimean War
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If statesmen gathered at the Congress of Vienna had made a wager on the country with which Britain would next fight a major war, the smart money would surely have been on France. For a long time, they would have had little reason to regret the bet. Between 1831 and 1844, Britain and France squared off in no fewer than four crises, in all of which contemporary observers saw a serious risk of war. In contrast, Britain and Russia competed in the Near East, but never came close to fighting. Yet the Anglo-French crises did not escalate, whereas when Britain confronted Russia over its attempt to coerce the Ottoman empire in 1853, it led to the first major European war in four decades. Why?

This short paper proposes an answer. It presents hypotheses, rather than evidence—the systematic testing remains to be done. My explanation, in a few words, is that neither France nor Russia had irreconcilable conflicts of interest with Britain, and the Crimean War could have been avoided. But while the transparency of France’s constitutional regime always left the British reasonably well-informed about its motives and intentions, the secretive character of Russian policy making invited misinterpretation. British policy makers and the British public misperceived fundamentally defensive Russian policies as aggressive, leading some, most importantly Lord Palmerston, to believe Russia must have its wings clipped.

Nevertheless, an avowedly preventive war could not have been sold to the British public. It had to be convinced that Russia presented a clear and present danger. The opaque nature of the Russian autocracy allowed British war hawks to make this case, by depicting ambiguous Russian policies in the worst possible light. Like Saddam Hussein, Tsar Nicholas I fell victim to threat inflation against a foreign autocratic leader.

Peace with France and war with Russia

Europe remained at peace after the Napoleonic Wars largely because the ruling classes of the four victor powers were content with the status quo, and even France was not so discontent as to go to great lengths to overthrow it.¹ France’s July Revolution of 1830, while giving impetus to French nationalism, also put a king on the throne, Louis-Philippe, who loathed war and strongly desired recognition from the other powers. In the 1840s, under the ministry of François Guizot, French policy grew still more status-quo oriented and conservative.² Nevertheless, Britain and France faced off twice in 1831—the first time when Belgian rebels against Dutch rule seemed about to name Louis-Philippe’s son their king, the second time when French troops entered Belgium to repel Holland’s attempt to reconquer it. In 1840, when Britain and the three eastern powers agreed to drive a French client, the rebellious Ottoman vassal Mehemet Ali, out of Syria, France exploded in fury and began military preparations. In 1844 Britain and France again

¹ Henry A. Kissinger, *A World Restored* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1964; originally published 1957); Matthew Rendall, “Defensive Realism and the Concert of Europe,” *Review of International Studies* 32/3 (2006): 523-40.

² Reiner Marcowitz, *Großmacht auf Bewährung: Die Interdependenz französischer Innen- und Außenpolitik und ihre Auswirkungen auf Frankreichs Stellung im europäischen Konzert 1814/15-1851/52* (Stuttgart: Thorbecke, 2001).

squared off—this time over the French annexation of Tahiti—bringing them “to the verge of war.” All four crises all ended with France backing down following British threats.³

In contrast, while Britain’s relations with Russia were sometimes tense and suspicious, for four decades not a single confrontation involving threats of force arose between them. From the 1820s to the 1850s, Russia supported the status quo more decisively than France, coming to be known as the “gendarme of Europe.”⁴ Russia’s restraint was most noteworthy in the Near East, where it broke with a long history of expansion at the expense of the Ottoman empire. Russia fought a war with Turkey in 1828-29 that took it almost to Constantinople, only to halt and conclude peace with modest territorial gains. In 1833 it put down a revolt by Turkey’s Egyptian vassal Mehemet Ali at the sultan’s request, and again withdrew its forces after concluding the treaty of Unkiar Skelessi, in which Russia promised to come to Turkey’s defense in return for the latter closing the Dardanelles to foreign warships. A few months later Russia and Austria concluded the Convention of Münchengrätz, a secret agreement in which they pledged to work together to preserve the Ottoman empire. Seven years later Petersburg abandoned Unkiar Skelessi in exchange for a multilateral agreement closing the Straits to the warships of all powers.

Throughout this period, Russia’s policy was to keep the Ottoman empire alive but under its thumb, as the internal correspondence of high-level decision makers makes clear.⁵ France, in contrast, patronized Egyptian rebels against Turkey, and provoked a major crisis in 1840 when the other European powers drove Mehemet Ali out of Syria. Nevertheless, British officials saw Russia as the principal threat to Turkey. When a dispute arose in the early 1850s between Catholic and Orthodox Christians over access to religious sites in the Ottoman empire, Petersburg backed the latter, and sent an envoy to Constantinople to demand rights of protection over the Orthodox population. After Turkey refused, Russia occupied the Danubian Principalities—modern day Romania. These actions alarmed British officials and aroused the British public.

Nevertheless, Russia did not want war, and by the second half of 1853 was backtracking from its original demands. In October, however, Turkey declared war on Russia, and in November Russia destroyed a Turkish fleet and with it much of the town of Sinope. Britain and France took the side of the Turks, and declared war on Russia in March 1854. Russia evacuated the Danubian Principalities in August 1854, before any serious fighting among the three great

³ Muriel E. Chamberlain, *Lord Aberdeen: A Political Biography* (London: Longman, 1983), quoted phrase at 351 and again at 360; Christopher Layne, “Lord Palmerston and the Triumph of Realism: Anglo-French Relations, 1830-1848,” in Miriam Fendius Elman (ed.), *Paths to Peace: Is Democracy the Answer?* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997), 61-100.

⁴ Alan Reinerman argues that in the first five years after the Congress of Vienna, Russia sought to undermine Austrian influence in Italy, going so far as to court Italian liberals. “Metternich, Alexander I, and the Russian Challenge in Italy, 1815-20,” *Journal of Modern History* 46/2 (1974): 262-76. See also Charles Webster, *The Foreign Policy of Castlereagh, 1815-1822: Britain and the European Alliance* (London: Bell, 1963; originally published 1925), 88-97.

⁵ Matthew Rendall, “Russia, the Concert of Europe, and Greece, 1821-29: A Test of Hypotheses About the Vienna System,” *Security Studies* 9/4 (2000): 55-96; *idem*, “Restraint or Self-Restraint of Russia: Nicholas I, the Treaty of Unkiar Skelessi, and the Vienna System, 1832-1841,” *International History Review* 24/1 (2002): 37-63.

powers had taken place. Nevertheless, Britain and France pressed ahead with the war.⁶ This outcome was different from those of the four Anglo-French crises. The contrast with the Belgian crisis of August 1831 is particularly striking. Here too the adversary sent its troops in a region of crucial strategic significance for Britain, prompting a British ultimatum. But though France withdrew from Belgium slowly and grudgingly, Britain did not escalate to the use of force.⁷ What made the difference?

Security seekers in a security dilemma

One might think that the Crimean conflict was a case of incompatible interests. It was clearly not an “accidental war,” since at least one party, Turkey, actively sought to bring it about.⁸ In Britain, influential politicians and interest groups, stood to gain from war and militarism, some with a special stake in the Near East. Palmerston, in particular, sought to appeal to the right with conservative policies at home, and to the center-left through liberal imperialism abroad. Had he pursued this social imperialist strategy against France instead of Russia, he would have risked losing his liberal supporters.⁹ In this respect, “cultural-normative” theories of democratic peace may help explain why Palmerston picked Russia, even if they largely fail to explain why Britain did not fight France in the earlier crises.¹⁰

Still, even if Palmerston stood to gain politically from war with Russia, there is ample evidence that he and his colleagues found Russian actions genuinely alarming. Nicholas I’s chief aim was to stabilize and dominate the Ottoman empire, and by so doing secure Russia’s southern frontier, but his efforts to establish a protectorate over Turkey—along with the extension of Russia’s influence into Persia and Central Asia—increased its capacity to threaten British India. At the same time, the tsar would not stand for the empire falling under the sway of any rival power, above all that of France. What Britain and Russia considered their security requirements may have been incompatible.¹¹ The two powers found themselves in a security dilemma: “a situation in which the measures that a state takes to increase its own security reduce its

⁶ Jack Snyder, *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 159; Jennifer Mitzen, *Power in Concert: The Nineteenth-Century Origins of Global Governance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 198.

⁷ Kenneth Bourne, *Palmerston: The Early Years, 1784-1841* (London: Allen Lane, 1982), 339-42.

⁸ David Gillard, *The Struggle for Asia 1828-1914: A Study in British and Russian Imperialism* (London: Methuen, 1977), 90; Joseph R. Gochal and Jack Levy, “Crisis Management or Conflict of Interests? A Case Study of the Origins of the Crimean War,” in Zeev Maoz et al. (eds.) *Multiple Paths to Knowledge in International Relations: Methodology in the Study of Conflict Management and Conflict Resolution* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 2004), 309-42.

⁹ Snyder, *Myths of Empire*, chapter 5, especially at 196.

¹⁰ In 1831, 1840 and 1844, Britain and France were quite prepared to threaten each other; indeed British coercive threats helped to resolve the four crises. A large share of Britons and Frenchmen did not even consider themselves to have the same kind of government—both sides regarded Britain’s regime as “aristocratic” and France’s “democratic”—and in 1840 it was the French king—“the most illiberal component of the French domestic political structure”—who pulled France back from the brink. See Layne, “Lord Palmerston,” quoted passage at 90; Matthew Rendall, “‘The Sparta and the Athens of Our Age at Daggers Drawn’: Politics, Perceptions and Peace,” *International Politics* 41/4 (2004): 582-604.

¹¹ Gillard, *Struggle for Asia*; Edward Ingram, *The Beginning of the Great Game in Asia 1828-1834* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979). On “incompatible security requirements,” see Paul Roe, “The Intrastate Security Dilemma: Ethnic Conflict as a ‘Tragedy’?” *Journal of Peace Research* 36/2 (1999): 183-202, at 187-88.

adversary's."¹² This problem was not just one of the British misinterpreting Russian actions. Because an adversary's goals can change over time, defensive measures can threaten other states even when the motives are recognized. Had the British more clearly recognized Nicholas's objectives as non-expansionist, they would still have worried about those of his successors.¹³

Moreover, whereas after 1830 a stabilizing solution was found in the strategically vital Low Countries, a comparable solution was not available in the Turkish case. By recognizing Belgium's independence from the United Kingdom of the Netherlands and neutralizing the new state, the great powers not only mitigated the security dilemma, but also escaped the risk of being "chain ganged" into a conflict.¹⁴ When the Dutch king invaded Belgium in August 1831, Britain could afford to allow France to defeat him, so long as it did not cross into Holland. Through most of the conflict, if one party proved intransigent, the great powers could back its rival, as they repeatedly showed themselves willing to do.¹⁵ But dividing the Ottoman empire would have been far harder and more dangerous, as the anxiety of statesmen showed whenever the question came up. The empire was too weak to defend itself, yet too large and important to allow any one European power to destroy or control it. When the Turks went to war with Russia in the autumn of 1853, they drew Britain after them. Dominic Tierney has recently cited World War I as "the only historical example that realist scholars have substantively argued is an instance of chain-ganging causing war."¹⁶ The Crimean War is actually a clearer case.

Do status-quo powers ever fight?

Some theorists deny that wars ever occur among states that wish to preserve the status quo.¹⁷ One explanation applies particularly to democracies, even those, like Britain and France in this period, with a limited suffrage. The transparency of democratic polities, Andrew Kydd maintains, allows other states reliably to assess each other's motives.¹⁸ There are two versions of this claim that must be distinguished. The first argument, associated with Kenneth Schultz, is that opposition parties make it harder for democratic governments to bluff, reducing the risk that an adversary will miscalculate. This promotes peace whenever at least one democracy is present.¹⁹ But even if this helps explain why Britain and France never came to blows—I have

¹² Charles L. Glaser, *Rational Theory of International Politics: The Logic of Competition and Cooperation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 8.

¹³ Gillard, *Struggle for Asia*, 39-42; Robert Jervis, "Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma," *World Politics* 30/2 (1978): 167-214, at 168.

¹⁴ On chain gangs, see Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1979), 168-70, and Thomas J. Christensen and Jack Snyder, "Chain Gangs and Passed Bucks: Predicting Alliance Patterns in Multipolarity," *International Organization* 44/2 (1990): 137-68.

¹⁵ Matthew Rendall, "A Qualified Success for Collective Security: The Concert of Europe and the Belgian Crisis, 1831," *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 18/2 (2007): 271-295.

¹⁶ "Does Chain-Ganging Cause the Outbreak of War?" *International Studies Quarterly* 55/2 (2011): 285-304, quoted passage at 295.

¹⁷ Andrew Kydd, "Sheep in Sheep's Clothing: Why Security Seekers Do Not Fight Each Other," *Security Studies* 7/1: 114-55; also Randall L. Schweller, "Neorealism's Status-Quo Bias: What Security Dilemma?" *Security Studies* 5/3 (1996): 90-121, at 118-19; *idem*, "U. S. Democracy Promotion: Realist Reflections," in Michael Cox, G. John Ikenberry and Takashi Inoguchi (eds.), *American Democracy Promotion: Impulses, Strategies, and Impacts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 41-62, at 45-47.

¹⁸ Kydd, "Sheep in Sheep's Clothing," 128.

¹⁹ Kenneth N. Schultz, *Democracy and Coercive Diplomacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

not done enough research to say—it would not explain why Britain ended up fighting Russia rather than France. In the Holy Places dispute that culminated in the Crimean War, it was the British government that issued ultimatums to Russia, with the public more united behind it than it had ever been against France.²⁰ There is no obvious reason why Petersburg should have had a harder time reading its signals than Paris.²¹

Democracies' transparency could also promote peace by reassuring other states' about their intentions. They know that if a democracy becomes aggressive, they will have ample warning. Whatever other complaints Saddam Hussein may have had about the 2003 war deposing him, he could not have claimed that it came as a bolt from the blue.²² This is a more promising candidate for explaining why Britain went to war with Russia and remained at peace with France. "Could it be," speculates one historian, "that the need to inform a national assembly or parliament, and perforce the press, of developments in technology, procurement, and policy—publicity that led to feverish war scares and popular demands for naval augmentation—also served to prevent serious misperceptions and unduly worrying worst-case analyses?"²³ This peace remained shaky, not because the two states were not transparent enough, but rather because France was far from being a "pure security-seeker."²⁴ The French left dreamed of expanding France's frontiers and overthrowing the Vienna order, and demanded a hard line at nearly every opportunity, even at the risk of war with Britain.²⁵

²⁰ See Susan Peterson, "The Domestic Politics of Crisis Bargaining and the Origins of the Crimean War," in Jack Snyder and Robert Jervis (eds.), *Coping with Complexity in the International System* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993), 107-35.

²¹ One possibility could be the distance between London and St Petersburg, and thus the much greater time that elapsed between signals and the response. Another might be that states with similar regime types are better at interpreting domestic processes in the other state. These would need to be considered in any thorough study. On the latter point, see Amanda Metskas, "The Benefit of the Doubt: Attribution Theory as an Explanation for the Democratic Peace," BA dissertation, Brown University, 2002, 36.

²² Kydd, "Sheep in Sheep's Clothing;" Charles Lipson, *Reliable Partners: How Democracies Have Made a Separate Peace* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 6. Some have questioned the claim that transparency leads to peace on the ground that the flood of information can "make it difficult to distinguish between 'signals' and 'noise'." See Bernard I. Finel and Kristin M. Lord, "The Surprising Logic of Transparency," *International Studies Quarterly* 43/2: 325-39, quoted passage at 320; Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, "Security Seeking Under Anarchy: Defensive Realism Revisited," *International Security* 25/3 (2000/2001): 128-61, at 151-52; Sebastian Rosato, "The False Logic of Democratic Peace Theory," *American Political Science Review* 97/4 (2003): 585-602, at 598-99. Even if this undermines theories which rely on democracies' ability to make credible threats, it poses little threat to the second kind of theory. As Karen Rasler and William R. Thompson put it, "One may not know which tactics democratic leaders will employ in a given situation, but it will be difficult to misinterpret their more general intentions." ("Malign Autocracies and Major Power Warfare: Evil, Tragedy, and International Relations Theory," *Security Studies* 10/3 (2001): 46-79, at 53; cf. Kydd, "Sheep in Sheep's Clothing;" 118-19.) Finel and Lord also argue that if media coverage has a systematic bias toward emphasizing the dramatic and the hostile, then greater transparency could lead to greater hostility. This might be true if the states are already suspicious of one another, but seems less likely to explain how good relations would turn bad, as the authors themselves seem to recognize ("Surprising Logic," 320, 336).

²³ Daniel A. Baugh, review of C. I. Hamilton's *Anglo-French Naval Rivalry, 1840-1870*, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 27/1 (1996): 123-25, at 125.

²⁴ On "pure security seekers," see Glaser, *Rational Theory*, 81.

²⁵ Philippe Darriulat, *Les patriotes: la gauche républicaine et la nation, 1830-1870* (Paris: Seuil, 2001). In the Belgian crisis, the left did not support the candidacy of the French king's son to the throne, or France's intervention to drive the Dutch from Belgium. Instead, it demanded the annexation of Belgium. The left actually welcomed the prospect that this would lead to war with the other powers. *Ibid.*, 30-36.

In support of his claim that security seekers do not go to war, Kydd notes that a state's political ideology, its treatment of minority groups and its behavior toward smaller neighbors also offer clues to its intentions.²⁶ Neither of the latter policies, however, is a reliable indicator as to how the state will treat another great power.²⁷ Political ideology can be a source of false as well as true inferences; notably, democracies often misconstrue the motives of autocratic regimes by inferring that brutal policies at home entail savage policies abroad.²⁸ This is by no means always true: Military dictatorships tend to be averse to foreign entanglements,²⁹ and the most peaceful Russian tsar of the 19th century, Alexander III, was also the most repressive. Moreover, if ideological differences intensify threat perceptions, as Mark Haas has argued, then this explains how autocratic Russia could have seemed especially threatening to liberal Britain. "Despite the fact that Nicholas I of Russia continued to forego opportunities for expansion in the Near East throughout the era of the Concert of Europe," Haas notes, "—decisions that according to rationalist accounts are supposed to be excellent costly signals of an actor's benign intent...Palmerston and fellow Whigs continued to believe that Nicholas was bent on significant territorial aggrandizement." This may help explain the readiness of Palmerston and Lord John Russell, both Whigs, to assume the worst of the Russians in the 1853-54 crisis, and the greater willingness of Tory Prime Minister Lord Aberdeen to give them the benefit of the doubt.³⁰

Kydd argues that even non-democratic security-seekers can reassure other states through costly signals.³¹ But while the state might be able to alleviate the other's fears in this fashion, it will not do so if it fails to recognize that its actions are contributing to a security dilemma. Instead, it is likely to interpret the other's defensive reaction as unprovoked and aggressive.³² The psychological bias toward cognitive consistency exacerbates this problem, since once the adversary image has been established, the state is likely to interpret new information in that light.³³ Failure to appreciate the security dilemma is common,³⁴ and Russian decision-makers

²⁶ Kydd, "Sheep in Sheep's Clothing," 142-43, 154.

²⁷ Glaser, *Rational Theory*, 160-61.

²⁸ Michael W. Doyle, "Liberalism in World Politics," *American Political Science Review* 80/4 (1986): 1151-69, 1161.

²⁹ Stanislav Andreski, "On the Peaceful Disposition of Military Dictatorships," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 3/3 (1980): 3-10.

³⁰ Mark L. Haas, *The Ideological Origins of Great Power Politics, 1789-1989* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), chapters 1 and 4, quoted passage at 13; also Metskas, "The Benefit of the Doubt," 28-37.

³¹ Kydd, "Sheep in Sheep's Clothing," 147; Gerald Geunwook Lee, "To Be Long or Not To Be Long—That is the Question: The Contradiction of Time Horizon in Offensive Realism," *Security Studies* 12/2 (2002/2003): 196-217, at 205; Glaser, *Rational Theory*, 183.

³² Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 68-73; Jennifer Mitzen and Randall L. Schweller, "Knowing the Unknown Unknowns: Misplaced Certainty and the Onset of War," *Security Studies* 20/1 (2011): 2-35, at 18-20. In so arguing, Schweller seems to be retreating from his earlier position that the security dilemma is not a problem among status quo states.

³³ Jervis, *Perception and Misperception*, 68. Charles L. Glaser has argued that since the groups of individuals used by states to evaluate other states' intentions are not as apt to suffer from misperception as a single individual, "[n]ational misperceptions...seems more likely to reflect the failure of national-level evaluative capabilities than individual cognitive limitations." ("Political Consequences of Military Strategy: Expanding and Refining the Spiral and Deterrence Models," *World Politics* 44/4 [1992]: 497-538, at 515.) That seems more likely to be true of the developed bureaucracies of modern democracies than of an early 19th-century autocracy, and even then it assumes that decision-makers make use of expert input.

³⁴ Jervis, *Perception and Misperception*, 88-89; Nicholas J. Wheeler, "'To Put Oneself in the other Fellow's Place': John Herz, the Security Dilemma, and the Nuclear Age," *International Relations* 22/4 (2008): 493-509. In contrast,

were no exception. While sometimes they showed awareness that Russian actions in the Near East could threaten or be misinterpreted by the other powers, they often treated Western fears as unreasonable. "A certain suspicion appears to be arising," the foreign minister, Count Nesselrode, wrote to the tsar in early 1834,

above all in regard to the further designs that might be connected to our recent territorial acquisition in Asia, whose geographical and political importance would seem to have been strangely exaggerated by the British government. Only time can reduce all these exaggerations to their just value, and gradually calm passions and hatreds that we know we have by no means provoked.

In 1838, Nicholas complained to the French ambassador of Britain's unwarranted distrust: "Who can think that I want to conquer Constantinople or enlarge my territory? It is not in Russia's interest, and I have shown that it was not my inclination."³⁵

I suspect an analysis of Russian decision-making in the run-up to the Crimean War would discover other such examples. Certainly Nicholas did not behave as if he were worried about alarming foreign powers.³⁶ Even if he had, it is not clear what costly signals, short of refraining from expansive demands on Turkey in the first place, could have reassured the British in the early stages of the crisis.³⁷

The road to preventive war

Russian policies in the Near East alarmed Britain, because of the importance, vulnerability and indivisibility of the Ottoman empire, and because of unavoidable uncertainty about Petersburg's present and future intentions. These would have been problems even if Russia had had a liberal regime. But the British also perceived Petersburg's motives as more expansionist than they really were, and here the secret and autocratic character of Russian decision making made it harder to reassure them. My argument predicts that British perceptions of French motives, in contrast, should have been broadly accurate. If this is so, this shows one way that the establishment of a liberal regime in France prevented great power war.

But it was not enough for British policy makers to be alarmed by Russian actions; they also required public support for going to war. While some British officials may have misread

David M. Edelstein maintains that "the most common theory that governments hold is that malign intentions are generated by insecurity." ("Managing Uncertainty: Beliefs about Intentions and the Rise of Great Powers," *Security Studies* 12/1 [2002]: 1-40, 13.) For an argument that contemporary Chinese leaders lack sensitivity to the problem, see Andrew Scobell, "Learning to Rise Peacefully? China and the Security Dilemma," *Journal of Contemporary China* 21/76 (2012): 713-21.

³⁵ Rendall, "Russia, the Concert of Europe, and Greece," 63-64, 79; Rendall, "Restraint or Self-Restraint," quoted passages at 57 and 62.

³⁶ David M. Goldfrank, "Policy Traditions and the Menshikov Mission of 1853," in Hugh Ragsdale and Valerii Nikolaevich Ponomarev (eds.), *Imperial Russian Foreign Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 119-58; V. N. Vinogradov, "The Personal Responsibility of Emperor Nicholas I for the Coming of the Crimean War: An Episode in the Diplomatic Struggle in the Eastern Question," *ibid.*, 159-70; Peterson, "Domestic Politics of Crisis Bargaining."

³⁷ William C. Wohlforth, "The Russian-Soviet Empire: A Test of Neorealism," *Review of International Studies* 27/5 (2001): 213-35, at 219.

Russia's present motives as aggressive, Palmerston saw the crisis as an opportunity to cut Russia down to size before it became a more serious problem.³⁸ In other words, he wanted to fight a preventive war.

Liberal states like Britain do fight preventive wars on occasion, but mobilizing public support for them presents a challenge.³⁹ Democratic publics are notoriously reluctant to pay to avoid future problems, and political leaders have strong incentives to avoid heavy present costs to avoid challenges that will arise only after they have left office.⁴⁰ "It is difficult to motivate the public to support a preventive war," observes John Mearsheimer:

Because the threat is not serious at the moment the public's sense of danger is unlikely to be high. Moreover, given the difficulty of predicting the future, many citizens are likely to think that the threat might not ever materialize for one reason or another. Preventive wars are also prohibited by international law as well as just-war theory, which make them a hard sell in many countries around the world.

The war must thus be oversold to the public as responding to an imminent threat.⁴¹ Provided that this case can be made, democratic publics may be prepared to shoulder the burden of even a sizable preventive war if persuaded that the adversary is hostile and unscrupulous.⁴²

It will be much harder, however, to "sex up" the case against a transparent liberal state. Publics have far more knowledge of both the other country's capabilities and of its motives. True, Reiner Marcowitz maintains that the British and French populations in the early 19th century still knew little of one another: "journeys across the Channel were the exception, and the knowledge of foreign languages extremely limited."⁴³ Both countries' leading newspapers, however, routinely summarized and translated excerpts from the other country's press. The attentive public may well have had a more detailed knowledge of what was going on in the other country than readers of even the best British and French papers today. In contrast, Russia would have been an all but unknown quantity, and threat inflation much more likely to succeed.

³⁸ Snyder, *Myths of Empire*, ch. 5. I understand that this is also the thesis of Hermann Wentker's *Zerstörung der Großmacht Rußland? Die britischen Kriegsziele im Krimkrieg* (Göttingen: Vanderhoecht and Ruprecht, 1993), though I have not yet read it.

³⁹ Jack S. Levy, "Preventive War and Democratic Politics," *International Studies Quarterly* 52/1 (2008): 1-24. In a 1992 paper ("Domestic Structure and Preventive War: Are Democracies More Pacific?" *World Politics* 44/2 [1992]: 235-69), Randall Schweller argued that democracies do not launch preventive wars, but this claim is no longer tenable. It is worth noting that Schweller's finding that all preventive wars had been launched by non-democracies did not code the Crimean War as a case (*ibid.*, 254).

⁴⁰ Jack S. Levy, "Declining Power and the Preventive Motivation for War," *World Politics* 40/1 (1987): 82-107, at 103; Schweller, "Domestic Structure and Preventive War," at 242; Levy, "Preventive War and Democratic Politics," 20-21. Andrew Kydd ("Sheep in Sheep's Clothing," 148-49) and David Edelstein ("Managing Uncertainty") argue that the reluctance to go to war on the chance that a currently peaceful state could someday become a threat is not limited to democracies.

⁴¹ John Mearsheimer, *Why Leaders Lie: The Truth About Lying in International Politics* (London: Duckworth Overlook, 2011), 65. Cf. Schweller, "Domestic Structure and Preventive War," 247.

⁴² Levy, "Preventive War and Democratic Politics," 15-16.

⁴³ Marcowitz, *Großmacht auf Bewährung*, 172.

Randall Schweller argues that democracies are averse to preventive war because “it implies the unprovoked slaughter of countless soldiers...on the mere assumption that future safety requires it.” Democratic leaders can get around this moral constraint by portraying the attack as humanitarian. Schweller himself notes that the Crimean War was presented to the British public as a defence of Turks against “Russian oppressors,” and of course the 2003 war against Saddam Hussein was sold as “liberating” Iraq.⁴⁴ This justification works against repressive autocrats, but not against fellow democracies. While some French radicals would have been happy to liberate Britons from their aristocratic oppressors,⁴⁵ it would have been hard to sell a preventive war against France as a war to liberate Frenchmen.

A double barrier to war between democracies

If the foregoing argument stands up to testing, then it will provide an explanation for the democratic peace. Modern democracies tend to be reasonably content with the status quo. Many are rich and powerful, or friends of states that are, and benefit from the existing international order. Stable, well-established democracies often subscribe to civic rather than ethnic nationalism, and thus understand the “nation” as congruent with their borders.⁴⁶ While strong democracies often attack weak states, they are averse to costly wars. Few will be ready to pay the costs of defeating a peer competitor or its allies, or of overthrowing the existing international order, unless they believe it is necessary to preserve their security or independence.⁴⁷

Nevertheless, status quo states may believe that they are threatened by other security seekers. Claims that they will always remain at peace are too sweeping; they can misinterpret one another’s current motives, and they may fear that with rising power, the other will later become revisionist. Probably these two worries usually go together.⁴⁸ While states can often convey their intentions through costly signals, leaders may not see the need to send them, as the case of Nicholas I shows. If a lack of “security dilemma sensibility”⁴⁹ is common, then autocracies should often fall victim to the security dilemma.

Liberal democracies, in contrast, signal their intentions whether or not their leaders recognize the need to do so. This renders peace among security-seeking democracies “automatic”: it is “produced or preserved without being actually *willed* by any state.” Whereas “manually operated” systems break down if less perceptive or skillful leaders come to power, an

⁴⁴ Schweller, “Domestic Structure and Preventive War,” 245-46; see also Christopher Daase, “Democratic Peace—Democratic War: Three Reasons Why Democracies are War-prone,” in Anna Geis, Lothar Brock and Harald Müller (eds.), *Democratic Wars: Looking at the Dark Side of Democratic Peace* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 74-89, at 80-83.

⁴⁵ Rendall, “Sparta and Athens.”

⁴⁶ Arie Kacowicz, “Explaining Zones of Peace: Democracies as Satisfied Powers,” *Journal of Peace Research* 32/3 (1995): 265-76; Rasler and Thompson, “Malign Autocracies,” Benjamin Miller, *States, Nations, and the Great Powers: The Sources of Regional War and Peace* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), chapter 8.

⁴⁷ Bruce Bueno de Mesquita, James D. Morrow, Randolph M. Siverson and Alistair Smith, “An Institutional Explanation of the Democratic Peace,” *American Political Science Review* 93/4 (1999): 791-807; Schweller, “U.S. Democracy Promotion,” 48-52.

⁴⁸ Kydd acknowledges the theoretical possibility of states that perceive each other as security-seekers fighting preventive wars, but argues that empirically this is seldom, if ever, the case. (“Sheep in Sheep’s Clothing,” 147-49.)

⁴⁹ Wheeler, “To Put Oneself into the Other Fellow’s Place,” 496.

automatic system is foolproof.⁵⁰ Moreover, even if democratic leaders misread or deliberately distort another security-seeking democracy's motives and capabilities, they will find it nearly impossible to sell their publics on a preventive war. This creates a double barrier to war between democracies. If preventive motivations have been a major source of great power war in history, as has been claimed,⁵¹ then the unwillingness of democratic dyads to fight them should be an important source of peace.

The foregoing argument points to a chronic problem for Russia. A gap between the country's potential and actual power has often caused it to seem threatening, but at the same time vulnerable to preventive attack.⁵² This problem has been compounded by an opaque foreign policy making process, leaving outsiders uncertain about its motives. Though it is less widely recognized, this also makes the country an easy target for threat inflation by foreign leaders, whether in the 1850s or during the Cold War. It is far easier to "scare hell out of the American people" when the bogey's motives and capabilities remain invisible.

These problems persist today. What is Putin really doing in Ukraine? Is he trying to reconquer the country, stave off the spread of Western influence, or something else? How far would the Russian public support him in going? Without truly competitive elections and a government responsible to parliament, it is hard for outsiders to tell. One of the greatest achievements of the Congress era was the establishment of a constitutional regime in France. One of the greatest setbacks of the post-Cold War era has been the failure of democracy in Russia.

⁵⁰ Inis Claude, Jr., *Power and International Relations* (New York: Random House, 1962), 46-50, emphasis in original.

⁵¹ Dale C. Copeland, *The Origins of Major War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000);

⁵² Jack Snyder, "Russian Backwardness and the Future of Europe," *Daedalus* 123/2 (1994): 179-201, at 185-86.