

The *Umma* of Democracy

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This article challenges the democratic-peace literature to extend its scope by considering some of the underlying characteristics that might otherwise explain the absence of war between states. In particular, the article proposes that residents of democratic states share a common sense of community, and that people who share a sense of community do not wage war with one another. This proposal is illustrated by comparing two very unlikely cases: the peace dividends generated by the Islamic community of believers, or *umma*, in the seventh century and the modern *umma* of democratic states. In both cases, shared perceptions, rituals and political attributes are shown to bind warring tribes or states together in a community of informal and peaceful allies. The consequences of this argument for policymakers and social scientists are discussed in the concluding section.

Keywords community • democracy • democratic peace • Islam • *umma*, peace

AMERICANS HAVE COME TO EMBRACE the democratic peace: US foreign policy is increasingly inspired by a determined belief that spreading democracy encourages peace. In the Middle East and beyond, promoting democracy is now seen to play an important role in securing the USA's strategic interests. Thus, US President George W. Bush (2005) believes that 'when freedom and democracy take root in the Middle East, America and the world will be safer and more peaceful'. His predecessor, President Bill Clinton, used the 1994 State of the Union address to assert that no two democracies had ever gone to war with one another and to explain why promoting democracy abroad was a pillar of his foreign policy.

In holding this belief, the United States is surely not alone. Most states welcome the spread of democracy and peace as ends in themselves. Few, if any, stakeholders would be upset if an initial investment in democracy could result in a significant peace dividend. Indeed, it is increasingly common for states to see progress along both fronts as intricately linked by the notion of a democratic peace.



While the legacy of the democratic peace can be traced back to (at least) Immanuel Kant's ([1795] 1991) *Perpetual Peace*, the popularity of the idea today can be explained by one of the strongest and most remarkable empirical relationships in contemporary social science: democratic states avoid going to war with one another. This statistical relationship is so strong that it inspired Jack Levy (1989: 270) to call it the nearest 'we have to an empirical law in international relations'. With the legitimacy that comes from empirical social science, policymakers have become increasingly confident that introducing democracy can encourage peace.

I worry that this confidence may be misplaced as policymakers embrace a rather narrow interpretation of a strong empirical relationship. While few academics are willing to question the strength of the empirical relationship, there is little consensus about the underlying logic that links democracy with the absence of war, or that such logic applies to different levels of aggregation (see, for example, Gleditsch & Hegre, 1997). Such uncertainty has significant consequences for policymakers who might hope to exploit any potential peace dividend. It is at these consequences that much of this article is directed.

In addition, I hope to encourage researchers to recognize the limited applicability of the existing democratic-peace research strategy. By focusing on democracies, analysts have been forced to confine their study to the modern period, where data and cases are readily available. Although war is a permanent scar on the political landscape, democracy (at least as it is usually operationalized) is a remarkably young phenomenon. Indeed, at the turn of the 20th century – just over a hundred years ago – there were no states that enjoyed universal suffrage for competitive multiparty elections (Freedom House, 1999). As a consequence, most of the empirical studies in the democratic-peace tradition begin around 1813. Worse, wars are so rare that the number of relevant cases is remarkably slim. Consequently, random chance alone might account for the democratic peace (Spiro, 1994). By focusing on the democratic peace (and the particular causal mechanisms linked to modern democracies), students of international relations necessarily limit themselves to a small and contemporary sample of world events.

Social scientists should welcome approaches that cover a broader range of phenomena, exposing them to more opportunities for falsification (King, Keohane & Verba, 1994: 22). In this light, students of international relations should strive to create new theories with broader applicability that can incorporate the democratic-peace finding as a subset of a larger phenomenon.

The present article aims to encourage this type of thinking. Its basic premise is that the democratic peace is caused by something that is not unique to the nature of information, culture and/or institutions in democratic states. Instead, I suggest that the lack of conflict between democratic states can be explained by a sense of community, or *umma*, and that this

umma can be found in several zones of peace prior to (and even in competition with) the rise of the democratic peace. Outlining this community-based argument for peace is the task of the article's first section.

The potential for a community-based argument is developed with reference to a case that is not democratic. Indeed, my understanding of a peace-generating community was formed by reading up on Islamic political thought and history. By looking more closely at the *Pax Islamica* of the seventh century, I redefine the concept of *umma* in terms that are less bound to Islamic religious tradition. This is the goal of the article's second section. Here, I define a political *umma* as an informal community of political entities that share common political and perceptual traditions, united in opposition to a constructed enemy (the world beyond the *umma*).

With the concept of political *umma* in hand, I use the third section to briefly survey the academic terrain of the democratic peace. This survey is used to highlight common landmarks and conceptual features, as well as to illustrate how the concept of *umma* provides an alternative explanation for understanding the statistical correlation that we have come to associate with the democratic-peace literature. This explanation is less restrictive than today's dominant approach (it can be applied to a much broader universe of phenomena), and generates different lessons for states wishing to encourage peace.

At last, a short caveat. In the article that follows, I draw on historical and institutional caricatures of both Islam and democracy. Given the intense emotion and commitment dedicated to both, these caricatures risk offending believers of one, the other, or both. This is regrettable, and not at all my intent. As there are many contending paths to true Islam and true democracy, I hasten to note that these caricatures are not intended to depict either in essentialist terms: I have no particular commitment to any side of these internecine disputes. As I stated at the outset, my purpose is much simpler (and more earthly): to provoke reflection and discussion about the state of the democratic-peace literature and its consequences for policymakers.

A Community-Based Approach

Much of the democratic-peace literature relies on national (unit-level) factors to explain why democratic states do not go to war with one another. This literature tends to employ three (related) arguments.¹ The first is norm-based and holds that democratic states find other democracies to be reasonable, predictable and trustworthy. In particular, it is common to assume that

¹ For general overviews, see Russett (1993: 20–40) and Henderson (2002: 4–11). For specific examples of the first and second types of explanation, see Doyle (1986, 1997); Maoz & Russett (1993); Morgan & Campbell (1991); Morgan & Schwebach (1992); Owen (1994); Ray (1995a); Rummel (1983); and Weart (1994, 1998).

democracies share a number of norms that prohibit the use of violence among them: democratic cultures are said to prioritize peaceful conflict-resolution strategies. The second argument points to the institutional arrangement shared by democratic states. In particular, democracy's constitutional and legal restraints on executive action are said to provide it with the time necessary to arrive at peaceful resolutions. Also, the need for democratic elites to face re-election may provide them with an additional incentive to avoid war. Allegedly, democratically elected leaders find it more difficult to use force abroad (and the internal opposition finds it easier to mobilize against any proposed war). The third (and more recent) type of argument looks at the electoral incentives peculiar to democratic states, in terms of information and the size of the electorate.²

Other approaches look to the degree and nature of interaction among states to explain the democratic peace. For example, economic interdependence might promote peace by increasing contacts among democracies, thereby contributing to mutual understanding (see, for example, Oneal & Russett, 1997). Several authors take inspiration from Karl Deutsch's notion of security communities, to show how communication and interaction (e.g. trade, migration, tourism) can contribute to a sense of community, which itself can secure peace.³ As such, the relatively peaceful nature of democratic states (*vis-à-vis* one another) has been explained by their sharing: a security community (Cohen, 1994; Wagner, 2003); common foreign policy affinities and preferences (Gartzke, 1998, 2000); membership of international regimes (Henderson, 2002); and perceptions of a common identity (Owen, 1994; Kahl, 1998/1999). Thus, Ido Oren (1995: 147) observed that 'the democratic peace claim is not about democracies *per se* as much as it is about countries that are "America-like" or of "our kind"'.

Like the first group of arguments that focus on national characteristics, arguments based on shared identities tend to limit their studies to democratic states. But, for members of the latter group, there is no reason to focus on the democratic period (or set of states). Indeed, one of the most attractive aspects of the community-based approach to understanding conflict (and the lack of it) is that it can be tested on a much larger sample of cases. Embracing the

² Generally speaking, informational accounts assume that conflict is an inefficient outcome, and that democratic states tend to send more credible messages (securing more efficient and peaceful outcomes). Thus, Fearon (1994) argues that democratic leaders face high 'audience' costs when escalating a crisis and then backing down, while Schultz (1998, 1999) argues that intragovernmental competition between incumbent and opposition parties in a democracy can credibly reveal information about capabilities and intentions to adversaries. The selectorate approach is most commonly associated with Bueno de Mesquita et al. (1999). At its core is an argument that, *ceteris paribus*, democratic leaders need to be more careful than autocrats at choosing which wars to engage in and they need to try harder to win. In short, leaders in democratic and autocratic regimes face different incentives. For an empirical test of this argument, see Bueno de Mesquita et al. (2004).

³ See Deutsch (1953) and Deutsch & Burrell ([1957] 1968). For more recent versions of this argument, see several contributions in Adler & Barnett (1998).

explanatory value of communities can encourage us to see similarities in an otherwise disparate group of analysts who have focused on different, if overlapping, communities of peace. Thus, Bruce Russett's (1993: 77–78) observation that 'anocratic' states do not fight each other and Stanislav Andreski's (1980) evidence of the lack of war between military dictatorships suggest that we can find zones of peace among different constellations of states. This should encourage us to think beyond democracy as an explanatory factor.

In short, I believe that a community-based approach can help free social scientists from our rather myopic focus on democratic states. Because of their heavy reliance on datasets that prioritize state-anchored features (such as democratic cultures and institutions), most authors in the democratic-peace tradition are forced to rely on state-based, or – at best – dyadic, arguments. A community-based approach begins with individual states, but its focus is on communities of states. From this perspective, we are better positioned to understand (and see) systemic features of international relations.

There are normative advantages as well. Community-based approaches can still draw on the impressive empirical relationships tracked by the democratic-peace literature, but they can embrace these relationships without suggesting that the spread of democracy (by whatever means) can reduce the potential for conflict between states. If the existence of democratic institutions and cultures are coincidental to other – underlying and deeper – reasons for the lack of conflict between states, then spreading democracy at the expense of community may be dangerous. If we take these alternative explanations seriously, introducing democratic institutions or exporting democratic norms may be insufficient, even counterproductive, for securing a zone of peace.

For these reasons, it is worthwhile to consider a community-based argument for explaining the lack of conflict between democratic states: *residents of democratic states share a common sense of community, and people who share in such a community do not wage war with one another*. This sense of community is constructed by forging a sense of common identity through discourse (communication and interaction), institution-building and the perception of a common external threat. I am aware of this argument's shortcomings: it is shockingly simple, it comes perilously close to tautology, and its application will be complicated by problems of operationalization. However, I hasten to note that these very problems also haunt the narrower democratic-peace literature (Owen, 1994: 87).⁴

⁴ The most daunting problem for community-based arguments concerns how to provide a falsifiable operationalization of the concept of community. In this light, it is important to recall the difficulty that many have in accepting the standard ways by which democracy is today operationalized in large cross-national comparative studies. Like democracy, we can expect to find easily measurable institutional artefacts of community, but communities are also bound by more perceptual traits that are remarkably difficult to measure and compare.

The motivation for thinking about the relationship between community and peace comes from what might appear to be an unlikely source: early Islamic history. Islam today is not usually associated with a zone of peace: indeed, one of the bloodiest wars of modern time was fought between two Muslim states (Iraq and Iran).⁵ However, early Islamic history provides lessons about community-building that might help us to understand better the lack of conflict between democratic states.

Hence the title of this essay, 'The *Umma* of Democracy', as *umma* is the Arabic word for a community of believers.⁶ An early Islamic *umma* offers a remarkable example of how a war-prone region of the world came to resolve its differences and become the geographic focal point of a new *Pax Islamica*. To introduce this argument, I portray the *Umma* of Islam as a community largely at peace and describe the effect that this community had on the warring Arab tribes of the seventh century. But, I wish to expand on the concept of *umma*, decapitalize it, and anchor it in a more political context. To do this, we must take a closer look at the original context.

The Islamic *Umma*

If there were ever a true example of a Hobbesian state of nature, or an international system that was really anarchic, it must be the Arabian peninsula prior to Muhammad's arrival. Before the early seventh century, the Arabian peninsula was devoid of government or an overarching authority (the exception being Yemen in the southwest and portions of the north that were under foreign influence);⁷ the only recognized authority for most Arabs was the local tribal chief.

Although the most important tribes exercised a certain amount of authority in their respective areas, they remained largely at war with one another. In Makka, the dominant tribe was the Quraish; in Yathrib (Madina), the dominant tribes were the Arab tribes of Ahs and Khazraji, and the Jewish tribes of Nadir, Qainuqa' and Quraiza. The Quraish of Makka considered themselves superior to the Bedouins, but the latter had only contempt for the town-

⁵ Indeed, in an essay in the 'Special Davos Edition' of *Newsweek* magazine (December 2001–February 2002), Samuel Huntington (2001: 8) argues that 'Muslims fight each other and fight non-Muslims far more often than do people of other civilizations'.

⁶ It is sometimes suggested that the word is related to the Arabic word for mother (*umm*), but it is now generally agreed that the word probably comes from the Hebrew *ummâ*, which means 'tribe' or 'people'; see Watt (1968: 10).

⁷ Yemen had known one of the oldest civilizations of the world. A few centuries before the rise of Islam, it had been very prosperous and ruled by the Himyarite Kings. However, this prosperous kingdom was apparently wiped out by a series of catastrophes involving the dam of al-Ma'rib. In the north of the Arab peninsula, the Ghassanids and the Lakhmidians acted as buffer states for the Byzantine and Sassanid empires; see Engineer (1980: 17–18).

dwellers who for them were only a 'nation of shopkeepers' (Razwy, 2004).

Consequently, for several centuries, the defining characteristic of the region was lawlessness. Here, there could be little doubt that justice, literally, was the interest of the stronger. Legend and folklore tell of frequent acts of horrendous cruelty, where vendetta (*th'ar*) consumed whole generations of Arabs. Ibn Khaldun ([1377] 1970: 118), the famous Arab historian, was merciless in his description of the Bedouins: 'a savage nation, fully accustomed to savagery and the things that cause it. Savagery has become their character and nature. They enjoy it, because it means freedom from authority and no subservience to leadership.'

Vendetta justice was tribal based: the tribe had an obligation to protect its members, even if guilty. As a result, the region was engulfed in permanent warfare or *ghazū* (raids), and wars were often started at the slightest pretext, and could last for many years. Thus, the Battle of Basus lasted for 40 years, having started with a struggle between Banu Bakr and Banu Taghlib over a she camel. Similarly, the War of Dahis and Ghabra (the names of horses) between the Abesi and its sister tribe (Dhubyan) began over a horse race and lasted for several decades (Ali, 2003: 18).

Of course, these Arab tribes were not states as we know them; but they were political entities at war with one another. Nor can the Arabian peninsula of the time be mistaken for the international system, though it was clearly anarchic in nature. For the student of international relations, the most remarkable part of Islam's early history is how its Prophet Muhammad could mould this warring peninsula into a community of believers at peace among themselves.⁸ This remarkable community of peace was forged in two furnaces: one political, the other perceptual.

Politically, Muhammad was able to secure a broad following with a couple of impressive (and decisive) military battles. Following a stunning surprise victory at the well of Badr, and a severe defeat at the Battle of Uhud (625), Muhammad and his followers began a military spree that ended in empire. With the Battle of the Trench (627), he turned the tide by defeating an opponent that was nearly three times his size. Three years later, Muhammad returned to his home town to conquer Makka and established his reputation for military and political prowess.⁹ This reputation allowed him to secure a following that soon spread across all of Arabia.

The year following Muhammad's conquest of Makka is referred to as the Year of Deputations in Islamic history. This was a time when the sundry

⁸ While this is a commonly held depiction of events in the early seventh century, it is important to recognize the difficulty of trying to establish this *Pax Islamica* empirically, and to define its borders (both temporally and geographically). Much of the evidence for this peaceful transition comes from religious scholars who may have had an incentive to exaggerate the level of aggression among the Bedouin tribes (so as to implicitly exaggerate the effect of Islam in calming them). Needless to say, we do not have any concrete figures as to the number of battle deaths or the tribes involved.

⁹ This story is retold in many ways. I recommend Ruthven (2000) and Rodinson (1971).

Bedouin tribes sent deputies to acknowledge Muhammad's leadership and to seek alliances. By the time of Muhammad's death in 632, almost all of the tribes of Arabia had joined the *umma* as confederates. As members of the Islamic *umma* were not allowed to attack one another, the ghastly cycle of tribal warfare, vendetta, and counter-vendetta had ended. The *umma* had brought peace to war-torn Arabia.

Up to this point, it is hardly fruitful to speak of an Islamic state. Although Muhammad had drawn up a constitution for his rule in Madina, this constitution was confederal in nature and reflected a real need to accommodate various groups and interests. This was made clear in the very first paragraph, where 'the believers and Muslims of Quraysh and Yathrib and those who follow them and are attached to them and fight alongside them . . . form a single community [*umma*], distinct from other men' (cited in Rodinson, 1971: 152). Indeed, there were few traditional state responsibilities granted to the new Madina: all services were performed voluntarily in a spirit of cooperation; there was no bureaucracy, police or army; even the revenue stream was driven more by religious needs (purification) than economic or political imperative.

[This] very foundational document . . . was a tactful document drawn [up] by the Prophet to shift the centre of power from the tribal unit to the newly created confederation which was referred to as *ummali*. Moreover he [Muhammad] allowed various groups to follow their traditional ways and each group was made responsible to enforce order within the groups by observing these traditional laws (Engineer, 1980: 28).

While Islamic tradition holds that the resulting federation consisted of all tribes in Arabia, this is probably an exaggeration. Neither should we expect to find all of the alliances to be of similar worth. Surely, some of the deputations represented just a faction of their tribe as these factions hoped to use an agreement with Muhammad to get the better of a rival faction. Sometimes the alliances were based on a promise to become part of the religious community (e.g. they contained a promise to perform worship and pay a tithe/tax, the *Zakat*); at other times they were more strategic in nature. For example, alliances were made with border tribes on an equal footing: although these tribes did not become members of the religious community, they remained members of the political *umma*.

Still, the network of alliances established by Muhammad and his immediate predecessors tied the sundry tribes of Arabia into a common political *umma*. In this way, Muhammad's new community of tribes was akin to today's international system of states. Its nascent norms and institutions helped to secure a sense of community among tribal entities and to protect *umma* members from outside attack. Indeed, it is for this reason that Bertram Thomas (1937: 125) has referred to the Islamic *umma* as a 'super-tribe'.

After Muhammad died, a more formal state structure began to develop in

conjunction with the needs of the *umma's* territorial expansion. During the period of the first four caliphs (632–661),¹⁰ the burgeoning Islamic community began to adopt a more bureaucratic and state-like structure as it struggled to adjust to its expanding territory (Donner, 1986), but the character of the community resembled more a loose confederation than it did a unified state. Later, a more repressive machinery developed as the caliphate evolved into dynastic rule.

It is difficult to date the Islamic *umma* with any degree of accuracy. The starting date can be established with greater confidence by the Madina constitution in 622, but threats to the unity of the *umma* begin as early as Muhammad's death in 632. Still, it is not unreasonable to extend the period of peace until the end of the first three caliphates in 656. Under these four leaders, the Islamic *umma* established and solidified a number of political, social and religious institutions, and expanded far beyond the borders of the Arabian Peninsula: east into Persia, north into Byzantium, and west into northern Africa.

After 656, one can still speak of an Islamic *umma*, but it is one pregnant with difference and potential for conflict. As the community grew, it had to satisfy increasingly disparate needs. This required enormous political skill and agility. On the peninsula, the caliphs worked diligently to keep alliance with Bedouin tribes who refused to surrender their autonomy to a central authority. After all, a decade of peace (even under Muhammad's stewardship) was not much of a counterweight to centuries of tribal warfare. On the territorial margins of the growing state, the caliphs needed to integrate the increasingly heterogeneous populations that they conquered. At the same time, internal differences became more apparent, as Islam underwent its first two civil wars (in 656–661 and 680–694, respectively), the former of which marks the schism separating Shiite from Sunni Muslims (when Muhammad's cousin and son in law Ali was slaughtered with his men and family on the battlefield by a rival Muslim leader, Mu'awiya). Finally, a group of radical separatists, the *Khawarij*, had emerged at about the same time and took to terrorizing villages and towns.

While the overall unity of the Islamic *umma* can be exaggerated, especially after 656, there is little reason to question the basic (and common) assumption that the resulting *umma* was a great improvement on the warring state of affairs that prevailed in Arabia before Muhammad. It would seem that the notion of community was embraced by most of its members: the Arab masses found themselves united, whether in enthusiasm or in resignation, behind the leader of the community. Indeed, when the first real threat of schism in the Islamic community appeared between Ali and Mu'awiya at Siffin in 657, Mu'awiya order his troops to fasten copies of the Koran to the

¹⁰ Abu Bakr (632–634), Umar (634–644), Uthman (644–656) and Ali (656–661).

points of their spears in an apparent attempt to use the notion of unity to his advantage (and to halt the fratricidal struggle).

It is here that the second instrument of community, perception, comes into play. While Madina became an important point of institutional departure, and the military prowess of Muhammad and his followers provided much motivation for the disparate Arab tribes to join, the weights of political disintegration and war still prevailed over those of community and peace. To tilt the balance in favour of peace, Muhammad needed to create a sense of community that could bridge tribal allegiances.

This perception of community is supported by the five pillars of Islam. The diverse tribes of Arabia were enjoined to observe a carefully constructed social and ideological programme. In the process, they came to see themselves as part of an *umma*.¹¹ The five religious pillars of the Islamic *umma* are:

- *Shahadah*, or witness. The essence of participation in the religious *umma* is submission to God and admission that Muhammad is His messenger.
- *Salat*, or prayer. This basic duty of the religious *umma* was performed both individually and publicly, originally three times a day, later five. The ritualistic and physical movements of Muslim prayer help to promote group solidarity.
- *Zakat* is obligatory charity or prescribed alms. Members of the *umma* need to purify their personal property (*Zakat* means 'purification') by paying dues to the community for the upkeep of its weaker members. Traditionally, the *Zakat* constitutes a 2.5% annual levy on income and capital.
- *Sawm*, or fast. The religious community fasts for the whole month of Ramadan, the ninth month in their lunar calendar, during which all food, drink and sexual activity is forbidden between dawn and dusk.
- *Hajj*, or pilgrimage. Once in a lifetime, members of the religious *umma* are expected to undertake a pilgrimage to the Ka'ba in Mecca and participate in a series of community rituals.

Each of these pillars plays an important role in supporting the perception of an Islamic community, irrespective of territory, family or clan. For some of the pillars, like the *Hajj*, the *Sawm* or the *Zakat*, it is easy to see how they contribute to a sense of community. In others, the community-building role may not be self-evident, but it is clearly in place. Consider the effect of the *Salat*:

¹¹ Of course, for Muslims, the five pillars play a more important role in strengthening the individual's faith and sense of submission to God, to solidify his/her character, to discipline him/her for his role as God's faithful servant and steward on earth, to make it possible and easy for him/her to live in the manner ordained by God, and to reinforce the ties of Brotherhood and affection among Muslims; see, for example, Haneef (2002: 48).

By subjecting itself at regular daily intervals to a series of identical and repeated physical actions, the Umma subsumed the particularisms of tribal or racial identity in a common physical discipline. In the original context of beduin Arabia, and in parallel conditions elsewhere, the Muslim prayer had an effect similar to the discipline of the parade ground: the new recruits were welded into a single uniform body. The psychological impact of prayer was also effective at an individual level: by insisting on the interruption of ordinary mundane activities at least three times each day, it continuously reminded the believer of the superior claims of God and the community (Ruthven, 2000: 61).

In short, the Islamic world was drawn together in a community. The resulting *umma* was, at least in part, because of the enormous respect and authority that Muhammad enjoyed. But, it is also certain that many of the tribes who submitted to Muhammad did so for practical reasons (to gain security) rather than because they shared a common set of values and a common faith. In short, the new solidarity of the *umma* came to replace the old solidarity of the tribe; it provided a new super-tribal entity that could protect members from challenges from within (in the form of a pact among member groups) and present a common front to any threat emanating from beyond the *umma*.

In the terminology of modern International Relations theory, we might think of Muhammad's efforts in terms of a local hegemon: he had at his disposal the political, economic and military resources needed to cement a diverse community of tribes into a coherent *umma* of peace. These resources flowed, in part, from his intellectual and moral leadership (the latter of which was facilitated by his being a messenger of God). At the same time, Muhammad enjoyed significant talents as a politician, military leader and negotiator. These skills helped him to secure the basic political foundation for the broader *umma* – a system of support that allied tribes recognized as legitimate and mutually beneficial.

While the perception of community was established atop the five pillars of Islam, its identity was secured by its opposition to the Other. Islam divides the world in two: *dār al-Islām* and *dār al-harb*.¹² The territory of Islam (*dār al-Islām*) is comprised of Islamic communities and non-Islamic communities that accept Islamic sovereignty (i.e. it includes the community of believers in addition to those who had entered into an alliance with Islam); the Other constitutes the rest of the world (*dār al-harb*, or the territory of war). By describing the world in these (dichotomous) terms, Islam creates a stronger sense of community by strengthening the fraternal bonds within the community, at the expense of those outside the community. For this reason, we can expect an *umma* to generate peaceful relationships among groups within the *umma*, but remain aggressive and militaristic in its dealings with the

¹² Some Shāfi'ī jurists recognize a third temporary division called *dār al-sulh* (territory of peaceful arrangement) or *dār al-'ahd* (territory of covenant) that recognizes non-Muslim communities if they enter treaty alliances with Islamic authorities. However, this interpretation is generally not recognized by the broader Islamic community of jurists; see Khadduri (1966: 12).

world outside the *umma*. As W. M. Watt (1968: 16–17, emphasis mine) put it:

apart from alliances, every tribe was against every other tribe, a tribe had to be either for Muhammad or against him after his conquest of Mecca; neutrality was impossible when his power could be felt in most parts of Arabia. The decision to be for Muhammad or against him was basically a political decision. The religious aspect came in because Muhammad insisted that those who wanted to become his allies must accept him as a prophet, and this involved becoming Muslims.

These political and perceptual instruments of community were not maintained with equal vigour and/or success. With time, the political *umma* of Islam was undermined, even as the religious *umma* remained strong. This in itself is an important observation, as it suggests that the ideological or perceptual component of the community is a necessary but insufficient condition for maintaining the larger political *umma*. Arabic scholars have long noted the erosion of the political *umma* as the caliphate expanded territorially and was severed from its Arabic roots. Thus, Ibn Khaldun ([1377] 1970: 166) noted that, by the end of the 'Umayyad period (i.e. c. 750), 'the characteristic traits of the caliphate disappeared, and only in name remained . . . with the disappearance of Arab group feeling and the annihilation of the race and compete destruction of (Arabism), the caliphate lost its identity. The form of government remained royal authority pure and simple.' At the same time, the religious component of the *umma* remained strong, and even expanded. After all, today's Muslims continue to embrace the five religious pillars, and it is possible to speak of a transnational Islamic religious community (as evidenced in the widespread protests against the publication of less-than-flattering Muhammad caricatures in European newspapers).

This inability to maintain both the political and the perceptual components of the Islamic *umma* can help to explain why contemporary Muslim communities do not enjoy a sphere of peace, as noted at the beginning of this article. Despite the continued importance of the five pillars of the Islamic religious *umma*, Muslim states lack a common sense of political identity. Indeed, it is arguably this missing political component that modern Islamicists seek to retrieve.

In conclusion, a *Pax Islamica* was brought to a part of the world that was, for centuries, blighted by war. This region's phenomenal change of fortune, from war to peace – and the ability to sustain this peace over several generations – can be attributed to the strong sense of community that was built on the rituals embedded in the five pillars, and to the political (and military) leadership provided by Muhammad. The demise of the political component of the *umma* over subsequent centuries has corresponded with an increase in hostility between Muslim states.

The *Umma* of Democracy

What does all this have to do with the democratic peace? In this section, I want to cast light on the similarities shared by the seventh-century *umma* of Islam and the contemporary *umma* of democracy. In particular, each community enjoys peaceful relations among its members (while remaining in a state of war with the world beyond its community); members of both communities have strong incentives to remain a part of the community (or to join it originally) in the face of impressive (and daunting) military and political leadership; and each community is built on a number of shared beliefs and rituals that unite its members in opposition to the world outside. In both cases, a strong sense of community helps to galvanize a perception of shared experience and norms, while erasing territorial and cultural differences that could eventually lead to conflict.

I have already noted the remarkable tendency for democratic states to avoid war with one another. I have also noted a broad literature of community-based approaches that can be used to explain this outcome. For these reasons, this section will focus on some of the similarities shared by both *ummahs*, in the hope that these similarities might shine more light on the nature of peaceful communities.

For example, the pre-democratic world, like that in pre-Muhammad Arabia, was filled with conflict: many of these states actually did go to war with one another before becoming democratic. The history of the Islamic *umma* also draws our attention to the way in which states came to be members in the *umma*. Here it is also worth noting that many states joined the *umma* of democracy because of the direct 'persuasion' (e.g. Germany, Japan) or the indirect influence of the leading democratic state and military superpower: the United States.¹³ Having witnessed the military and political prowess of the USA, many non-democratic states raced to embrace its political leadership and to join the community of democratic states. In this way, the last decade of the 20th century can be understood as our own Decade of Deputations.¹⁴

Similarly, the *umma* of democracy stands atop its own defining pillars, although these are largely internalized by the community. Following the example provided by the Islamic *umma* above, we can divide up the democratic *umma* into its political and perceptual components. The political

¹³ Of course, it is somewhat of an exaggeration to grant the USA sole prophet status in the *umma* of democracy. The United Kingdom played a very important supporting role in the early years of the democratic (20th) century. Given the fraternal ties that bind them, we might think of the UK as the Abu Talib to the USA's Muhammad.

¹⁴ See Freedom House (1999) for empirical evidence of the recent and rapid rise in the number of democratic states.

components of the democratic *umma* are familiar to students of hegemony.¹⁵ The modern democratic period has coincided with first British then US hegemony. The decisive economic, military and moral position of these hegemonic states provided them with the ability and the will to create, nourish and enforce the democratic *umma*. Like Muhammad's Madina-based tribe, these hegemonic states rose to power, came to dominate their rivals, and established a number of rules, norms and institutions that created a sense of community among member states/tribes.

As in the Islamic case, the perceptual components of the democratic *umma* draw heavily from the rituals of everyday democratic practice. It is common to define democracies in terms of the practices and expectations shared by their denizens in common. Indeed, it is these common rituals (e.g. contested, regular elections for positions of power; broad political support; respect for political and civil liberties) that the democratic-peace tradition draws on to measure and compare the level of democracy across states.

These regular democratic activities, shared by members in the diverse community of democratic states, contribute to a sense of ideological community in the same way that the five pillars of Islam contribute to a strong sense of religious community. By participating in the same practices across disparate states, national citizens come to see themselves as members of the same (larger) community of democratic states. To the extent that these states share a similar level of economic development and exchange, we can expect to find their residents sharing many rituals that are not explicitly political (e.g. watching 'Big Brother', voting in Eurovision song competitions, eating Big Macs). At this point, we can simply plug into the earlier mentioned literature on community-building. As with the Islamic pillars, each of these perceptual pillars contributes to a sense of solidarity – to a strengthening of the bond that exists within the community, irrespective of territory, family or clan. While these rights, rituals and practices are performed in national institutional settings, they are similar enough in style and content to be recognized by other members of the community.

Finally, the *umma* of democracy is maintained with a sense of fraternity and internal community by distinguishing itself from the unbelievers. Like the Islamic *umma*, the *umma* of democracy finds it necessary to clearly distinguish between friend and foe.¹⁶ At first, an 'Iron Curtain' was drawn to

¹⁵ I assume that readers of *Security Dialogue* are familiar with the concept of hegemon and hegemonic stability theory. The latter assumes that the stability of the international system depends on the actions of a single dominant state to articulate and enforce the rules of interaction among the most important members of the system. Traditionally, a state is seen as hegemonic if it has the capability to enforce the rules of the system, as well as the will to do so, and is committed to a system that is perceived as mutually beneficial to the major states. The landmark text is Kindleberger ([1973] 1986); see also Keohane (1984).

¹⁶ Indeed, there is a school of thought that recognizes the role of the enemy in securing the order associated with a hegemon; arguably, it was the threat imposed by the Soviet Union, more than the hegemonic influence of the United States, that explains why the UK, France and Germany followed the USA throughout most of the postwar period; see, for example, Wyatt-Walter (1993).

separate democratic from non-democratic communities. When this curtain was finally lifted, leaders of the democratic *umma* turned to emphasizing new differences. A 'Clash of Civilizations' now provides the boundaries necessary to maintain the cohesiveness of the democratic community (Huntington, 1996). After 11 September 2001, this new line was drawn clearly in the sand: 'Over time it's going to be important for nations to know they will be held accountable for inactivity. You're either with us or against us in the fight against terror'.¹⁷

This political struggle between the 'free world' (which constitutes the *umma* of democracy) and its external demons is clearly evident in another statistical appendage to the democratic-peace literature: liberal democratic states are just as likely to make war (or commit violence) as other types of regimes. To quote the author of one of the foundational articles in this academic tradition: 'Liberal states are as aggressive and war prone as any other form of government or society in their relations with nonliberal states' (Doyle, 1983: 225).¹⁸

Consequences

While it may be sufficiently interesting to re-examine Islamic history and/or revisit the shared attributes of our democratic community, my intention in juxtaposing these two communities is to encourage some reflection on the rather narrow focus of the democratic-peace literature and the simplistic ways in which its lessons are being corrupted by today's policymakers. In doing so, I hope to encourage the discipline to consider and elaborate upon more community-based approaches for understanding the preponderance of peace among certain groups of nations, with a focus on *umma*. This approach has consequences for academics and policymakers alike.

For academics, embracing a community-based approach allows us to recognize the remarkably limited scope of democratic-peace arguments. By focusing on community, we can extend the analysis to cover a broader universe of cases (e.g. *Pax Mongolica*, *Pax Romana*, *Pax Sinica*), the study of which can help us better define the necessary and sufficient conditions for securing communities of peace. In the process, we will raise the glance of peace researchers beyond this 'universe with one remarkable statistical observation as its point of gravity' and extend the empirical record of the democratic-

¹⁷ US President George W. Bush, speaking at a joint news conference with French President Jacques Chirac, 6 November 2001; see CNN (2001).

¹⁸ See, for example, Dixon (1993, 1994); Morgan & Campbell (1991); Morgan & Schwebach (1992); Maoz & Russett (1993); Small & Singer (1976); and Ward & Gleditsch (1998). While this is the consensus, not everybody is convinced that democracies are as war prone as other political systems; see, for example, Hewitt & Wilkenfeld (1996); Ray (1995a,b); and Rummel (1983, 1985, 1995).

peace literature back in time (Gates, Knutsen & Moses, 1996: 3). Done correctly, developing a more comprehensive theory with greater heuristic utility is good science.

For the policymaker, an emphasis on community (rather than democracy) allows one to reconsider the consequences of different strategies for introducing democracy (and the form of democracy that is introduced). In particular, a community-based approach makes it more difficult to see how the forceful imposition of democratic institutions/culture on states will secure a broader peace dividend. Indeed, Immanuel Kant – from whom many researchers in the democratic-peace tradition draw inspiration – was clearly aware of this when he suggested that the fifth preliminary article for securing perpetual peace among states was that ‘*No State Shall by Force Interfere with the Constitution or Government of Another State*’ (Kant, [1795] 1991: 96).

The examples provided by the Islamic *umma* and the *umma* of democracy illustrate the attractiveness and utility of community-building as a means for expanding the sphere of peace. They also illustrate the importance of establishing and continually maintaining a sense of community. Communities of peace are dogged by entropy: they need continual attention and support from the hegemon, or they risk falling apart. While empire and community can coexist harmoniously, a well-functioning *umma* depends on mutual respect and recognition, as well as the perception of just and legitimate leadership. In this light, potential members may join in the *umma* on a voluntary basis, but the sense of community itself can be jeopardized by an attempt to force membership on unwilling states.

Rethinking the nature of the democratic-peace relationship forces us to reflect on the way in which policymakers have embraced this narrow interpretation and used it to inform a new ‘security policy manifesto’ (Clinton, 1996: 9). Joanne Gowa (1999: 109) even refers to this relationship in terms of ‘a textbook case of arbitrage between the ivory tower and the real world’. Speaking as a social scientist, it worries me to see how much faith policymakers are willing to place in the work of a handful of statisticians. Under these conditions, where wars are being fought in the name of a correlation, a little restraint and humility should be in order.

The comparison of these two *ummas* also can provide us with some predictive insight that might be checked against future developments. My depiction of the Islamic *umma* suggested that a strong religious community continued to exist even after the collapse of a broader political *umma*. It was the demise of the political *umma* that ended *Pax Islamica*.

To the extent that the democratic *umma* also relies on political as well as perceptual supports, and to the extent that the perceptual support is – in itself – insufficient to maintain the sense of community, then the role of the *umma*’s hegemon is central to its survival. In the current context, where the USA’s willingness and capacity to function as a hegemon is increasingly in doubt,

we can expect a corresponding demise in the democratic *umma* (and with it the democratic peace). While public support for the ideal and institutions of democracy may remain strong, the absence of a strong and legitimate political authority can weaken – even bring an end to – *Pax Democratica*. In other words, while the democratic-peace literature expects democratic states to remain at peace with one another indefinitely, an *umma*-based argument suggests that the future will see conflicts between democratic states.

By considering a sense of community as the reason for peace (rather than the implementation of particular elements of democratic rule), we might encourage more restraint in our policymakers. Better yet, we might encourage this restraint with reference to the same strong scientific evidence. If the real reason behind the lack of conflict between states is simply a sense of community, then securing the USA's strategic interests abroad (or those of any other country, for that matter) should be more about community-building and less about spreading democracy (especially from the barrel of a gun, or the bomb-bay of a B-2). Obviously, community-building and the spread of democracy can develop in tandem, but this is highly unlikely to happen under the threat of coercion.

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