

2019/2/4 (EN): What is war? Thoughts by Carl von Clausewitz

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Despite all international endeavours, international law treaties, peace movements, anti-war films, and Nobel Peace Prizes, war has not disappeared from Earth. The following statements are based upon the cognitions of the famous war theorist Carl von Clausewitz (1780-1831). At the moment, three ideological concepts are colliding in Europe, which are not reconcilable, thus showing a high conflict potential: Islamism, nationalism, and liberalism. Whereas liberalism as a consequence of Enlightenment puts the individual into the centre, propagating civil rights and liberties, democracy and rule of law, Islamism is targeted at homogenous community of (Islamic) believers under the rules of Sharia, and nationalism aims at implementing unity of the ethnic group under an autocratic regime. As nationalism and Islamism base their ideologies on hatred against all others and are willing to enforce them by violence, liberalism is endangered to fall behind due to its respect for the individual and to its deference to civil rights and liberties, democracy, rule of law, and non-violence. If, in the long run, liberalism does not succeed in bearing up against nationalism and Islamism, war and conflict as well as the decline of liberal value orders will be possible in Europe, too. For these reasons, unfortunately war in Europe is no mere illusion today. He who believes that economic interrelation is the best protection against war is badly mistaken. Already Norman Angell (1874-1967), who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1933, erred. In 1910 he explained in his legendary book titled „The Great Illusion“ in detail why, because of the strong economic interrelation between Germany and England as well as the international connections of telecommunication and the financial world, war had become pointless and thus also improbable. Then, in 1914, the First World War, the “Great Catastrophe of the 20th Century” broke out. In 2013 Jean-Claude Juncker, in connection with the debate about the future of the currency union, warned that the conflicts in Europe might come to a dangerous crisis: “He who thinks that the eternal question of war and peace will never occur again, might be seriously mistaken. The demons have not disappeared, they are only asleep.”

