Andreas Herberg-Rothe (ed.)

Lessons from World War I for the Rise of Asia

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Editorial

This series is intended as a publication panel of the Centre of Intercultural and European Studies (CINTEUS) at Fulda University of Applied Sciences. The series aims at making research results, anthologies, conference readers, study books and selected qualification theses accessible to the general public. It comprises of scientific and interdisciplinary works on inter- and transculturality; the European Union from an interior and a global perspective; and problems of social welfare and social law in Europe. Each of these are fields of research and teaching in the Social- and Cultural Studies Faculty at Fulda University of Applied Sciences and its Centre for Intercultural and European Studies. We also invite contributions from outside the faculty that share and enrich our research.

Gudrun Hentges, Volker Hinnenkamp, Anne Honer & Hans-Wolfgang Platzer

Editorial

Die Buchreihe versteht sich als Publikationsforum des Centrums für interkulturelle und europäische Studien (CINTEUS) der Hochschule Fulda. Ziel der CINTEUS-Reihe ist es, Forschungsergebnisse, Anthologien, Kongressreader, Studienbücher und ausgewählte Qualifikationsarbeiten einer interessierten Öffentlichkeit zugänglich zu machen. Die Reihe umfasst fachwissenschaftliche und interdisziplinäre Arbeiten aus den Bereichen Inter- und Transkulturalität, Europäische Union aus Binnen- und globaler Perspektive sowie wohlfahrtsstaatliche und sozialrechtliche Probleme Europas. All dies sind Fachgebiete, die im Fachbereich Sozial- und Kulturwissenschaften der Hochschule Fulda University of Applied Sciences und dem angegliederten Centrum für interkulturelle und Europastudien gelehrt und erforscht werden. Ausdrücklich eingeladen an der Publikationsreihe mitzuwirken sind auch solche Studien, die nicht ‘im Hause’ entstanden sind, aber CINTEUS-Schwerpunkte berühren und bereichern.

Gudrun Hentges, Volker Hinnenkamp, Anne Honer & Hans-Wolfgang Platzer

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World War I and the Current Conflicts in the World – An Introductory Essay

Andreas Herberg-Rothe

All countries in the non-Western world have only one aim – to be recognized again as equal by the leading Western powers in order to regain their former status as world powers and civilizations, which was lost in the process of European colonization and subsequent American hegemony. The desire for recognition is the driving force behind the economic and political rise of Asia. The same was true with respect to the conflict between established, rising, and declining powers before World War I. Are there lessons to be learned for our times from the devastating conduct and outcome of World War I? Is there only one lesson to be learned – that you can learn nothing from history? Or are we doomed to repeat history if we learn nothing from it? History will not repeat itself precisely, but wars repeatedly occur throughout history, even great wars. We are living in an age in which a war between the great powers is viewed as unlikely because it seems to be in no one's interest, since the outcome of such a war would be so devastating that each party would do its utmost to avoid it. Rationality seems to dominate the assumptions and way of thinking in our times. But no war would have been waged if the losing side, or even both sides, had known the outcome in advance.

Historical analogies are not just a subject for historians or mere abstract – they form our way of thinking about how to deal with today’s conflicts. The most important problem for the political discourse of our times is whether an analogy to the pre-World War I era or that of the pre-World War II era is appropriate for dealing with the current conflicts in the world. If we use concepts and strategies with the main aim of avoiding a repetition of totalitarian or imperialist movements and states, which led to developments similar to those resulting in World War II, a realist approach might be reasonable. This would mean rearmament, an arms race, deterrence, regime change, and even war to avoid a new world war. Writing this political discourse, John Bolton, former US Ambassador to the UN, emphasized: To stop Iran's bomb, bomb Iran (New York Times, March 26, 2015). But if the current situation more closely resembles the pre-World War I era, these

strategies and policies to avoid a similar development leading to World War II would eventually lead to a repetition of World War I.

1914, the beginning of the First World War, has not repeated itself as the start of the First World War in Asia in 2014. But there are striking similarities between the pre-World War I era and the current developments in Asia: the one-hundredth anniversary of World War I signifies the danger, not the inevitability, of a new world war in the decades to come. World War I is a symbolic representation of the risk that a war amongst the great powers could erupt even though nobody would benefit from it. It is the writing on the wall that rationality does not guarantee avoidance of self-destruction. Although the 1914-2014 analogy has already passed, the more disturbing problem is marked by 1915 – the year in which a still-limited European war escalated into a world war.

All predictions regarding a repetition of World War I in Asia are based on the assumption that it would be in no one's interest to fight a large-scale war that could lead to the destruction of great parts of Asia, Europe, and North America (the presence of weapons of mass destruction also worsens the prospects). But what if conflicts in Asia would not be fought to pursue national interests so much as recognition? That is, to be accepted as equal again after the humiliation over the course of European colonization and subsequent American hegemony? Indeed, acknowledgment of past suffering seems to be a trauma on the conscience of many Asian nations. Are those desires irrational or simply a different kind of rationality that we have to take into account?

During her last visit to Beijing in September 2012, then-US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton held a press conference in which she stated that the world would soon see, for the first time in history, that a rising power and an established power would not engage in a war. Of course, her statement was related to China and the US. Additionally, she compared the competition between China and the US with that of the Peloponnesian War between Sparta and Athens – authoritarian Sparta against democratic Athens. Athens, the strongest city-state in Greece before the war, was reduced to a state of near-complete subjugation, while Sparta established itself as the leading power. Thucydides, the chronicler of the Peloponnesian War and one of the ancient world's most important historians, saw the initial cause of this war in the growth of Athenian power: "What made war inevitable was the growth of Athenian power and the fear which this caused in Sparta." Unlike Plato,

though, Thucydides argues that it was not the striving for power in itself, but rather fear of losing power and, in the long term, fear of being oppressed, robbed of one's freedom, and enslaved that caused the escalation leading to war. In Thucydides's account, fear was the cause of war on both sides. Sparta was afraid of the growth of Athenian power and Athens was afraid of what might happen if it gave in to an escalating series of demands and threats without a foreseeable end.

No one wanted World War I to happen. Or, at least, no one wanted the kind of war that actually took place. The general assumption was that the conflict would be very limited. The Europeans who went to war assumed they would be home by Christmas 1914. We know now, of course, that World War I not only happened but that it also resulted in the self-destruction of the European powers in two world wars. World War I teaches the lesson that a limited conflict can escalate into a nightmare of millions of deaths and unspeakable suffering for which no rational explanation could be found. Military aims and strategies gained priority over meaningful political goals. Although the generals of the German Empire believed that they were relying on Clausewitz's theory, they actually perverted it. Tactics replaced strategy, strategy replaced politics, politics replaced policy, and policy was militarized. It was as if everybody was saying that being at war means we stop thinking.

Perhaps the deepest hidden reason for this escalation was that each war party could admit neither defeat nor failure. A striking piece of evidence for this assumption is that the proclaimed war aims of the German Empire gained momentum the more unrealistic and irrational they became. The pride, honor, and identity of the German Empire prohibited the acknowledgment of defeat and failure. The same was true for Russia, France, England, the Habsburg Empire, and the Turkish Empire. Perhaps these Empires especially knew that their rule wouldn't survive if they had to acknowledge military defeat or failure, as either would have ruined their identity and they would have lost “face” (social recognition within their society and community). A military defeat would signal their “symbolic death” – and so, the empires fought a war for life and death. This does not mean a simple equation of rising China with the then-rising German Empire. Although the actors then and today seem quite different, the dynamics generated by the conflict between emerging, rising, and declining powers are strikingly comparable.

Robert MacNamara, the US Secretary of State during the Cuban Missile Crisis, famously noted that it was sheer luck, not rationality, that prevented

the escalation of that crisis into a world war. In 1983, the world needed more than good luck to avoid nuclear disaster. In the present day, all great powers are using military means to pursue their political and economic interests. But we simply should not allow ourselves to bet that military conflicts and strategies will not lead to the escalation of limited conflicts into great power wars.

The re-politicization of war and globalization

Since the end of the East-West conflict, terms like risk society, reflexive modernization, and globalization have been used in both academic and public debates as part of an intensifying discourse about how the accelerating transformation of social and national identities is affecting societies. Social, political, and economic developments devalue knowledge that has been handed down and traditional models of interpretation and give rise to a need for new perspectives.

Cultural and religious conceptions of order, in their special historical and contemporary contexts, were re-actualized for providing orientation to people in a quite dramatically changing world. As processes of change and transformations of their life-worlds affect people, they reconstruct and reorganize these conceptions of order so that they can comprehend and explain their changing world. In the way people build communities in order to defend and promote these different kinds of order, these aspirations become automatically political in essence. In a globalized world, these communities are becoming increasingly political, regardless of whether they exist for a long or short time or whether they seem to be determined by religion, culture, national aspirations, or a tribal background. The sole aspect of importance is that they are defending their identity and spreading their order and values as a community against or with others.

With these proposals, I do not want to draw into doubt some tendencies towards a privatization of war and violence in general (because they are appropriate for particular cases), but that current developments in the strategic environment display fundamentally conflicting tendencies: between globalization and struggles over identities, locational advantages, and interests; between high-tech wars and combat with "knives and machetes" or suicide bombers; between symmetrical and asymmetrical warfare. The

conflict is also between the privatization of war and violence and their re-politicization and re-ideologization—conflicts over “world order”; between the formation of new regional power centers and the hegemonic dominance of the only superpower; between international organized crime and the institutionalization of regional and global institutions and communities; and between increasing violations of international law and human rights on one side and the expansion of international law and human rights on the other.

Liberal progress produces illiberal counter-reactions, and some political forces are pursuing a liberal order with elements that could be regarded as essentially illiberal. But the main distinction is whether we fight disorder and privatized violence or whether different kinds of order are in a conflicting competition.

This conflict becomes most apparent not only in the way in which we ourselves conceive the concept of victory, but even more importantly in which ways, for example, low-tech adversaries define victory and defeat. This is an exercise that requires cultural and historical knowledge about their political order much more than it does gee-whiz technology.

Robert Kaplan argued that the rules of war could only be applied against enemies with which we share a similar cultural background or at least a similar concept of rationality, but that the rules of the jungle must be applied to survive “new wars.” This is fundamentally wrong because outside the "developed world," there is not one single jungle in which the Hobbesian war of all against all is the predominant kind of conflict. However, there are also extensive areas of the world in which violent conflicts about political, cultural, social, and even religious order are emerging. In the long run, these kinds of conflict will be prevalent. Robert Kagan argued that Europeans are from Venus, enjoying peace, whereas the US-Americans are from Mars and have to secure this peace by power-politics and even by force. But he admitted that this was not always the case and argued that until the beginning of World War I and Woodrow Wilson’s presidency, these roles were reversed. But if this was the case, the paramount question remains: to which results for the European powers did their pure power politics before World War I lead? Nothing other than the self-destruction of Europe in World War I.

Conflicts about different kinds of order

After the collapse of the global system of order in the Cold War, most conflicts initially revolved around the contrast between order and disorder (as symbolized by concepts such as privatized violence, low-intensity conflict, and failed states). Since 1996, when the Taliban seized power in Afghanistan, different conceptions of order were at stake.

The German sociologist Max Weber emphasized that an order maintained for goal-oriented interests is much less stable than one that is respected "as a matter of custom arising from a settled behavioral orientation." This kind of order, however, is much less stable than "one which enjoys the prestige that follows from being seen as exemplary or binding; let us call this 'legitimacy.'" It is very nearly possible to synchronize Max Weber's classification of the different levels of stability of different orders, resting on interests, custom, or legitimacy, with the previous developments in warfare starting with the collapse of the Soviet Union. Immediately after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, wars related to private enrichment and the pursuit of interests were most visible. These were then gradually replaced by conflicts involving ethnic groups, the formation of small states, and national minorities. Finally, they were replaced by concepts of "world order" such as Islamism, which doesn't contribute to individual interests or ethnic rivalries.

Huntington's emphasis on cultural and civilizational conflicts between different conceptions of order captured one important aspect of ongoing developments, but he too mechanically treated these conflicts as taking place between civilizations, when in fact they are just as prevalent within civilizations, if not more so. But he was right in assuming that future conflicts are shaped by those conflicts concerning local, regional, or even world order, regardless of whether this particular kind of order is more related to culture or religion or "civilization."

These simultaneous processes of disintegration and reconstruction of order within communities are in (often violent) conflict with those between many communities, as well as with the overall tendencies grounded in geopolitics and globalization. The key problem here is not the value we attach to our own conception of order, but the fact that the conflict dynamic obeys rules that differ from those operating in a paradigm where conceptions of order and anarchy confront each other directly.

Globalization

It is obvious in my view that globalization is intensifying conflicts over world order, which leads to the return of geopolitics of different great and even global powers. The main task, therefore, is to avoid the escalation of conflicts between old and new global powers (most of the latter are old empires, striving for their renewed recognition as world powers, which they have lost in the process of colonization) and to avoid an arms race that could eventually lead to new traditional wars, considering the unstable situation most noticeable in states like Pakistan and Ukraine, but possibly also in former empires such as India, China, and Russia.

Politics must not be reduced to power politics within or between states. The negative effect of one-sided power politics could be observed in the developments that led to World War I and in our times can be observed in the Israel-Palestinian conflict as well as in conflicts in failed states like Syria, Ukraine, Libya, and Egypt. Although the relation of policy and war as Clausewitz describes it did not change substantially, a globalized world does need a concept of policy and politics that fits the ongoing process of globalization. Clausewitz wrote: "It can be taken as agreed that the aim of policy is to unify and reconcile all aspects of internal administration as well as of spiritual values, and whatever else the moral philosopher may care to add. Policy, of course, is nothing in itself; it is simply the trustee for all these interests" – not against other states, as Clausewitz wrote in his time, but against the worldwide expansion of war and violent action within and between states.

In the past 20 years, we have witnessed expectations of revolution in military affairs (RMA) and the appearance of seemingly new kinds of warfare, the so-called “new wars.” The RMA promised to present, to a serious extent, technological solutions for political conflicts. Warfare and "military operations other than war" seemed to be legitimate if they were easily won. The costs would remain limited and the adversary could be presented as an outlaw of the international community, in a classical view, as a dictator or warlord who would have no support from the majority of the populace. All three propositions proved fatally wrong in Afghanistan and Iraq. For a short period, this understanding of the current battle space was revived in the campaign against Libya and the interpretation of the Arab Spring through Western eyes, which are used to view communities as being composed of individuals

whereas in most parts of the world society is composed as a “community of communities.” This is more important as more technical opportunities are expected in 21st century warfare. To put it bluntly: the evolving battle space of the 21st century is about ethics and the morality of using force—its legitimacy. The more technical opportunities in warfare we develop, the more the morality of its use comes to the fore.

There are many structural similarities between the pre-1914 period in Europe and the current conflicts in Asia. History will not repeat itself exactly, but the resemblance is striking. There are good precautionary warnings from the comparison. Nevertheless, the task is no longer to discuss whether similarities or differences count for more. The real task is already to take precautionary steps now in order to ensure that no new world war will start in Asia. Here, Cold War efforts to avoid military conflict between the superpowers (such as the "hotlines" between Washington and Moscow) could be meaningfully applied to the current conflicts in Asia. As it stands, the lack of multilateral institutions – like those created in Europe after 1945 – to settle the disputes in Asia is in itself dangerous.

Hegel's notion about the importance of the struggle for recognition leads to the conclusion that intercultural communication is not only necessary with respect to relations between Europe and Asia, but perhaps even more important within Asia. A world war starting in Asia would not be about interests, but rather would be a cultural war for mutual recognition. Only intercultural communication and strong multilateral institutions are capable of avoiding the nightmare of a great power war in Asia, which would lead to a repetition of 1914. Globalization poses the same problem for modern warfare as the French Revolution and Napoleonic warfare did for the theory of war in their times. The eminent Chinese scholar Zhang Wei Wei has argued that the world is at a watershed for the transformation of a hierarchically structured international system to a more symmetrical one. Nevertheless, this proposition does not only have serious implications for the US, but also for China, India, and Russia. Based on Hegel's proposition of the “progress in the consciousness of freedom” and Zhang Wei Wei's observation, it could be said that we are at a watershed in world history: the transformation of merely hierarchical societal relations into more symmetrical ones between and within societies by ensuring the progress of freedom as well as the human right of equality.

The contributions collected in this volume attempt to identify the forces that could lead to a repetition of history and to outline measures and mechanisms that could contribute to the avoidance of such a nightmare. All the authors have different backgrounds; as tensions are mounting between their respective nations, they might well be viewed as representatives of those nations. But this would not do justice to their intellectual effort and the fact that despite their differences, they all share the desire to contribute to a development in which political and military conflicts don't escalate into a new world war. The aim of this anthology, therefore, is to initiate a discourse for the decades to come, in which despite our conflicting or competing interests, identities, and self-understandings, the obligation to develop policies and strategies in order to avoid the escalation of conflicts and competition in Asia into a new world war gains momentum.

Thomas Hobbes once famously noted that the natural state of mankind is not peace, but the war of all against all. We should not delude ourselves with the assumption that peace is the natural state of mankind in our age. The late Yitzhak Rabin made the proposition: you don't need to make peace with your friends, you need to make peace with your foes. Carl Schmitt believed that the essence of politics is the differentiation of friends and foes. In my interpretation of Hannah Arendt and Carl Schmitt, the differentiation of friends and foes is the initial proposition of politics, but its final aim is the mediation of friends and foes, to find a common ground *between* these antagonistic contrasts without eliminating the competition (this concept stems from Plato, Eric Voegelin and Hannah Arendt). This might be the most important lesson we should learn from history.