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Balancing Civilizations to avoid their Clash

Clausewitz's theory as political-philosophical paradigm for the twenty-first century

The Cold War ended a long time ago. Nevertheless, our thinking is still obsessed with the concepts developed during this period, particularly toward its end. Although think tanks worldwide are trying to develop new paradigms for rapid societal, political, economic, cultural, and military transformations, paradigms outside the military realm often remain rooted in French poststructuralism (Derrida, Foucault) and Lyotard's conception of postmodernism. Another school of thought envisions hypermodernity free from colonialism, the two world wars, and the Holocaust (Habermas and Giddens). While one group argues that these violent excesses are regrettable but unrelated to the essence of the "West," the anti-colonial movement claims that Western values are merely lip service and that its practical politics are still characterized by oppression, exploitation, violence and force to secure only their interests. The same is true for a lot of newly industrialized nations. Here anti-colonialism just serves to legitimize the violent rule of the elites in these countries.

My approach aims to rethink twenty-first-century developments and paradigms through Clausewitzian dialectics rather than Cold War/post-Cold War tropes. This applies not only to French "master thinkers," such as Foucault, Derrida, and Lyotard—who developed the concept of postmodernity—but also to Habermas and Giddens, who developed the concept of Western hypermodernity. However, Western hypermodernity and postmodernity are already over. We are in danger of repeating "another bloody century" which is often justified by contrasting civilizational norms. Most of Huntington's critics have overlooked the fact that he did not write his book to advocate for a clash of civilizations, but rather to avoid it. Some of his other critics argued that there could be no clash of civilizations because, in their view, there are other "religions," but only one civilization: the Western one. Despite his shortcomings, it is evident that the "others" are not only religions or cultures but also civilizations. In the 19th century, Western powers conquered the world. In the 20th century, defeated nations and civilizations had to live with the victorious West. In the 21st century, the world's civilizations must learn to live together; otherwise, Huntington's "clash of civilizations" will become a reality.

Therefore, I aim to introduce the concept of a floating balance of opposites based on Clausewitz's dialectics of defense and offense. It also attempts to apply this concept to a variety of topics, including warfare, civilizational encounters, identity, and global capitalism, and ultimately extends it to philosophy. This floating, progressive balance

can be compared to a sinus curve on a slightly increasing x-axis. This example illustrates that such a balance is changing and is subject to movement while simultaneously obeying "laws" of motion. This approach can be characterized by thinking in terms of waves. Without motion, seas and lakes die; if the waves are tsunamis, they destroy everything in their path. Clausewitz's dialectics include those of Hegel and Confucius but are much more non-teleological and practical with a contingent character.

Three problematic consecutively developments stand out: First, the peaceful end of the Cold War was misunderstood as an unqualified triumph of Western modernity. Wars were viewed solely as interventions to protect human rights and promote democracy. Today, however, interstate wars have returned to the agenda of world politics due to the rise of the former colonies and vanished civilizations. We are witnessing a return of global power politics. Second, anti-colonialism, which is normative undisputable right, has in a lot of cases given rise to just anti-Western political rhetoric. The "rise of the others," the newly industrialized nations, has partly led to authoritarian and, in some cases, dictatorial states that derive their legitimacy almost exclusively from an anti-Western impulse (e.g., Iran , Syria, North-Corea and Russia). This development is particularly tragic when Russia's imperialist war of aggression against Ukraine is legitimized by an anti-imperialist impulse. A third point that should not be overestimated is the cultural revolution of the right and the return of political religions like Middle Eastern Islam (IS, Taliban), evidenced by the rise of new nationalism and racism in most parts of the world, sometimes in the form of a victimization-discourse. As Samuel P. Huntington emphasized, we are experiencing a return to thinking in friend-foe categories. In short: The global village has given rise to the concept of the globalized villager. We are witnessing a world that is materially and communicatively interconnected, but psychologically provincial. Therefore, we need to understand identity differently.

While these findings are not new, a new paradigm of concepts that considers these developments and opens up new perspectives against all odds is missing. At the center of this is Clausewitz's concept of the fluid balance of opposites, which he concretizes through the dialectics of attack and defense. This concept lies within the field of tension between the harmony of opposites, as described by Confucius, and the conflict of opposites, as portrayed by Hegel. Rather than viewing both positions as binary opposites, we see them as poles in a conceptual field. Our perspective is based on the assumption that what is hegemonic in one civilization is non-hegemonic in another. Vivid examples of this proposition include the world-system approaches of Wallerstein, as well as the theories of peripheries of Samir Amin and André Gunder Frank in the early stages of his career. These approaches are based on holistic models and are hegemonic in most non-Western civilizations. In China, however, it is debated whether it is a modern state or a civilization (Zhang Wei-Wei).

This balance should not be confused with arbitrariness. Similar considerations can be found in a "family" of theories tied to balancing opposites and in polarity. Important examples include Aristotle's concept of the middle and Sigmund Freud's concept of the ego balancing the "id" and "superego."

This approach does not claim to solve all political and philosophical problems, nor does it aim to do so. It aims to provide sufficient reason for a new paradigm that is not based on particle theories like idealism and realism, which, despite their differences, are based on fixed identities. Rather, it is based on thinking in waves. This is a reflection on what I have labeled hybrid globalization.

Planned contributions:

I. Prologue:

II. Clausewitz's approach – polarity, balance, dialectics

1. Clausewitz's Wondrous Trinity as a General Theory of War and Violent Conflict
2. Clausewitz's dialectics: Method and Theory

III. Civilizations in the Twenty-First Century

3. Balancing Civilization: Neither Clash, mere Multiplicity, nor Conversion
4. The Cultural Revolution from the Right: new friend-foe constructions
5. The Catastrophe of Post-Modern Capitalism: VUCA and BANI worlds as basis of hybrid globalization
6. Balancing Ethnic Universalism and Cultural Relativism

IV. Philosophical Approaches

7. Beyond Post-Structuralism and Postmodernity – Clausewitz in philosophy
8. The Never-Ending Legacy of Hegel – beyond Clausewitz – Nothing as absolute equilibrium
9. Identity Matters in hybrid Globalization — but it must be understood as a balance
10. Intercultural Philosophy as a progressing and balanced virtuous circle

V. Epilogue and Political Perspectives