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An Old Question Raised Again: "Is War merely the Continuation of Politics?"

This talk is part of a longer study, as part of "The Perpetual Peace Project ~ 2022," concerning what could be called the deconstruction of the Westphalian peace as one of the most important factors in understanding the return of the question of "the Balance of Europe" in response to the war in Ukraine today. In his 1962 "Theory of the Partisan," Carl Schmitt invoked this history in describing the legal code of international law that was established to make possible a limited or "bracketed war" on the European continent, thereby protecting the boundaries between the temporal states of war and peace, and providing the juridical and diplomatic terms to distinguish between a "just or legal war" between existing nation-states and an indefinite or unlimited civil or partisan warfare, especially in the context of the various imperial, neo-colonial, and nationalist revolutions in Asia and Latin-America. It is at this point that Schmitt turns to the analysis of the reform-minded Prussian military officer, Clausewitz, who, in *On War* (1808), first addressed the problems to this "classical" theory of warfare that was caused by the new existence of partisan strategies and tactics of warfare, and it is precisely from this context that we find a new interpretation of the proposition that "war is a mere continuation of politics by another means."

In a recent op-ed by the Marxist theorist and former student of Althusser, however, Etienne Balibar refers to this famous phrase somewhat dismissively as "a common slogan that We (i.e., the Left) never tire of repeating," even though he is certainly aware that this slogan first entered the canon of Western Marxist philosophy precisely through Vladimir Lenin's early and quite original appropriation of Clausewitz's analysis of partisan warfare to the define the figure of the partisan philosopher as a new conceptual persona in the revolutionary global warfare carried out against Western imperialism. In fact, it is Lenin's "theory of the partisan" that Schmitt identifies as a completely new determination of the "enemy-concept," which, according to his argument, has resulted in nothing less than the complete destruction of the concept of a limited or bracketed war that the Congress of Vienna had hoped to restore to the European continent (and to the world!) after WWII. As a result of the deformation of the original meaning of Clausewitz's statement that "war is [ideally!] the continuation of politics" that Lenin introduces in 1916 on the eve of the second Russian revolution, which has become "lost in historical philosophical diversions and genealogies"—including, I will argue, the theoretical diversions and genealogies that "we" have primarily inherited from a certain tradition of post-'68 French Marxist Theory. Because "we" have lost the original problematic underlined by this statement, in this talk I return to analyze Lenin's earlier appropriation Clausewitz's original proposition, which he transforms into a revolutionary "slogan" that has become a commonplace axiom in both traditional Marxism and Leftist philosophy, more generally, and which today has become hopelessly contradictory in its ability to distinguish the real aims of both politics and war, and may indeed signal the end of a polemical (i.e., Leninist-Bolshevik) tradition of partisan philosophy.