

# Humanity forsakes Enlightenment's peace vision



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## P A N E L

Has the primordial norm of human history been war or peace? Have human beings, throughout the ages, subsisted in serenity, or have they traversed most epochs in war with one another? Dr. Habibollah Fazeli and Dr. Jahangir Moeini Alamdari, two members of the faculty of Political Sciences at the University of Tehran, responded to these questions in a panel discussion entitled "War and Peace in Contemporary Political Thought," convened on November 15 at the Faculty of Law and Political Sciences of the University of Tehran. In accordance with the expositions of Fazeli and Moeini Alamdari, the exclusive axiom of human history has been war rather than peace; even in the modern age, particularly in the 20th century, the number of wars — internal or interstate — has multiplied. The rationale for organizing this panel was that these two esteemed professors of political sciences, beyond presenting a historical narration and elucidation of war and peace, examine the scientific substrata, political and social causes, and even instinctual and cultural grounds of the eruption and proliferation of wars.

The pivotal nucleus of their argumentation was a critique of the Enlightenment, in the sense that the Enlightenment of the 17th and 18th centuries in Europe, in realizing its claims of terminating wars and inaugurating an era of human peace, categorically failed. In explicating why this Enlightenment project collapsed, the two scholars offered distinct arguments. Habibollah Fazeli contends that the reason for the defeat of the Enlightenment strategy — and other strategies such as Liberalism and Marxism — in constructing the exemplary society and human being is the disregard of two categories: culture and instinct. Moeini Alamdari, invoking the views of Carl von Clausewitz, the German thinker and theorist of war, emphasized that, contrary to Clausewitz's position, war is not necessarily initiated or concluded by political will; rather, war, like all living systems, possesses its own autonomous and self-referential vitality, and for this reason, once a war has commenced, its termination is not contingent on the will of statesmen but derives from the internal mechanisms of war itself.

With this prologue, one may apprehend the titles of the two lectures more perspicuously. The subject of Dr. Fazeli's lecture was "War, Enlightenment, and Crisis in Contemporary Political Thought," while the subject of Dr. Moeini's lecture was "A Critique of Clausewitz's View of War Based on the Principle of Autopoietic Systems". These two professors of political science at the University of Tehran, beginning from two divergent points of departure, examined the reasons for the failure of pacifistic conceptions — particularly the Enlightenment strategy — to bring an end to wars; yet despite this divergence, they converged upon a single conclusion: given their analytical considerations and the evidence of the contemporary world, the likelihood of the expansion of wars in the future is greater.



## Fazeli: Culture, instinct as two determinants of defeat of strategies



Habibollah Fazeli

Habibollah Fazeli began his remarks in the panel discussion "War and Peace in Contemporary Political Thought" with the premise that "whether in the classical age or in the modern age, political thought has always been entangled with war and peace."

According to this professor of political science at the University of Tehran, "the engagement with war was such that certain classical thinkers believed that if the quiddity and essence of war were apprehended, the causes of war would vanish." Emphasizing that "from the thinkers of ancient Iran to Plato, Thucydides, and Aristotle, there is no political thinker who has not addressed the question of war," he explicated the temporal contexts in which thinkers engaged war. "In certain epochs, reflection upon war occurred amid wars themselves — such as Sun Tzu, Freud, and Ardashir — and at other times, after a war's occurrence or during the existence of a war-laden atmosphere within a polity, the idea of contemplating war would arise, as with us Iranians who have just experienced a war, or the Middle East, where war is virtually everyday sustenance." This professor at the University of Tehran, in articulating the enduring seriousness of war for humanity, referred to the renaming of the United States Department of Defense to the Department of War; and, noting that this change was instituted by a country that deems itself responsible for international order, declared, "This alteration from the Department

of Defense to the Department of War in America is profoundly meaningful."

Fazeli extrapolated the issue of war or conflict to everyday human life and said, "There is, in essence, no point or domain within life that has ever been devoid of war."

According to this professor of political science at the University of Tehran, "All these evidences, from antiquity until today, indicate that even during peace, war is contemplated and must be contemplated."

The member of the political science faculty, continuing his elucidation of why war merits perpetual consideration, referred to the expansion of the number and scope of wars in the modern age and said, "From 1945, when the Second World War ended, until today, 300 wars — inside and outside countries — have occurred, which collectively have resulted in the deaths of more than 200 million human beings."

He observed that "some of these wars were internal," enumerated the logic of civil wars as "race, language, ethnicity, and analogous factors," and stated that "civil wars occurring within countries and societies have generally entailed greater massacres and tragedies than external wars conducted against foreign enemies."

After presenting these historical introductions and empirical evidence concerning war and its role in human existence, Fazeli dedicated his time to explaining why the efforts — particularly those of the modern age beginning with the Enlightenment — to restrain wars have culminated in failure.

In explaining the causes of this failure — especially the failure of the Enlightenment to end wars and construct a peaceful world — he invoked the concept of "strategy" and clarified why modern strategies to create a

better world and a better human being have been defeated.

This professor of political science at the University of Tehran, declaring that "strategies collapse before two forces: culture and instinct," defined "strategy" thus, "Strategy signifies a political system or voluntaristic directive for engendering a condition, such as the will to engender a fascist system or the will to engender a communist system, or any other voluntaristic modality for constructing an unnatural utopian existence that possesses a program for everything from corporeal technologies to the furthest horizons of the world."

Fazeli, stating that "in this sense the Enlightenment is likewise a cognitive strategy," articulated the dimensions and aims of "the Enlightenment as strategy" thus, "In the Enlightenment strategy, the idea was pursued that one could construct another cosmos and recreate the human; in fact, the world could be fashioned otherwise — a world imbued with peace, wherein human beings act and behave on the basis of rationality, thereby diminishing the level of violence."

Why did the Enlightenment strategy fail to attain these beautiful and perhaps exalted aims and, in practice, instead of reducing wars, witnessed their escalation? Fazeli answered

thus, "Strategies — including the Enlightenment strategy — have two adversaries or opposing forces: one is the historical culture sedimented within societies, and the other is human instinct."

Explicating instinct and its role in the emergence of wars, he declared, "Classical Greek and Iranian philosophers regarded war as natural, such as Plato, who asserted that war is the progeny of the instinct of wrath. In the Middle Ages, Aquinas also deemed war natural and believed it could not be eluded."

Noting that "most classical political philosophers believed that war is the result of natural instinct and is ineluctable and that only its limits may be delineated," he continued, "But beginning in the 17th and 18th centuries, in the epoch of the Enlightenment, the thinkers of this era believed that another world could be constructed, and that human beings could be educated and rationalized so that they might become more ethical and less war-inclined." According to Fazeli, it is subsequent to these Enlightenment-associated ideas that strategies such as "the creation of perpetual peace" are born — ideas which held that republican systems in the world or Europe would not wage war against one another.

The illustration shows several prominent figures of the Enlightenment era, a European intellectual movement of the 17th and 18th centuries, which posited that democracy causes peace.

● [Fazeli](#)



Why did the Enlightenment strategy fail to fashion a world imbued with peace and, in practice, instead of reducing wars, witnessed their escalation? Dr. Habibollah Fazeli answered thus: "Strategy signifies a political system or voluntaristic directive for engendering a condition. Strategies — including the Enlightenment strategy — have two adversaries or opposing forces: one is the historical culture sedimented within societies, and the other is human instinct."



The chart shows the growth in the number of wars between the 1500s and the 2000s.

● [ResearchGate](#)

