

An Alternative to the Clash of Civilizations Scenario in the 21st Century

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Introduction

The term civilization has come into a focal point in current intellectual and political discourse since the publication of Samuel Huntington's controversial thesis on the subject. Since the work revolves around ideas related to the future of humanity, many scholars have joined the debate, although some have rejected the idea arguing the thesis as self-contradictory because a civilized individual is not supposed to get involved in clash with others. Yet many observers of current affairs, particularly in the mainstream media, are convinced that the clash of civilizations is a fact of international politics today. That is why it has become absolutely pertinent for every historian, philosopher, and social scientist concerned about world peace and civilizational harmony to participate in this debate. Has the idea turned out to be a historical reality? Or this is just a myth which interest groups and individuals have manipulated in order to promote their political aspirations? We shall examine these questions below.

It is widely recognized that Harvard professor Samuel P Huntington advanced the idea of the clash of civilizations in the 1990s as a guideline for US foreign policy makers following the fall of the former USSR. However the author of the thesis did not advance the theory in a vacuum. It came in the context of the end of the cold war in international politics. Therefore one needs to take a long view of history in order to understand the phenomenon.

Around the end of the 20th century Robert Nisbet entitled the last chapter "Progress at Bay" in his *History of the Idea of Progress* (1980) and concluded that, "the scepticism regarding Western progress that was once confined to a very small number of intellectuals in the nineteenth century has grown and spread to not merely the large majority of intellectuals in this final quarter of the century, but to many millions of other people in the West."¹ Nisbet recommended a religious awakening or "even a major religious reformation" to revive the faith and optimism in the progress of current civilization in the West. The subject has motivated many scholars: In 1987 Paul Kennedy published *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* with a different approach, but reached to a similar conclusion. He analyzed economic and military changes within the European civilization since 1500 CE and held the view that big powers have always maintained their supremacy in world affairs by keeping a prudent balance between the creation of wealth and military expenditure. The failure to maintain such a balance in modern Europe had caused the fall from supremacy of Spain, the Netherlands, France and Britain respectively at different times in history. This has continued till the middle of the twentieth century. He also warned the cold war rivals at the latter half of the twentieth century, the United States and the Soviet Union, of similar consequences.

¹ Robert Nisbet, *History of the Idea of Progress* (New York: Basic Books, 1980), 317.

In 1992 Francis Fukuyama published a more controversial book – *The End of History and the Last Man* – defending the nineteenth century European optimism in progress and in the human nature. He expressed his firm belief that the last man in history, aware of his strengths and weaknesses, and aware of his ‘perfect rights’ and ‘defective duties’, will subscribe to ideas of liberal democracy. He also expressed his firm confidence in “a liberal democracy that could fight a short and decisive war every generation or so to defend its own liberty and independence would be far healthier and more satisfied than one that experienced nothing but continuous peace.”² Fukuyama’s view of progress of modern European civilization seems directly in conflict with Robert Nisbet’s views. Within years Samuel Huntington wrote yet another more controversial book *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* and argued that there was a clash of civilizations in our contemporary times. And there was a need for today’s dominating players in world politics to understand the nature of this clash: Huntington made policy recommendations for the US Government.

The subject of interest of all four scholars is modern European/ Western civilization and its future. The civilization that witnessed tremendous growth and progress for at least four hundred years has been facing difficulties since the beginning of the 20th century, and historians and philosophers of history have expressed their strong reservations about its future. E. H. Carr once complained, “The decline of the west has become so familiar a phrase that quotation marks are no longer required.”³ Robert Nisbet and Paul Kennedy although only partially agreed with the general theme of the decline, they argued that this civilization needed some remedy for its survival and further progress. However while Nisbet, an intellectual historian, identifies the need for a religious reformation to remedy the situation, Kennedy – a military cum economic historian – emphasizes the need for economic growth to counter the problem of modern civilization. On the other hand, Francis Fukuyama and Samuel Huntington, both political scientists, seem to be more interested in maintaining the supremacy of the United States in contemporary world affairs.

A serious debate over the fate of Western civilization began after World War I although European thought had already witnessed crises during the last two decade of the nineteenth century. A number of distinguished intellectuals expressed their views on the “degeneration” witnessed within the European society. This debate reached the level of the common people when Oswald Spengler, a natural scientist turned historian, published the first volume of his *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* or *The Decline of the West* in 1918. This was a shocking conclusion about the fate of European civilization; for, Europeans had a very high expectation about the future of their civilization. This pre-war optimism is reflected in one of Arnold Toynbee’s profound observations. Toynbee, who was born in 1889, expressed the optimism of his generation as:

[My generation] expected that life throughout the World would become more rational, more humane, and more democratic and that, slowly, but surely, political

² Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: The Free Press, 1992), 329.

³See E. H. Carr, *What is History?* 2nd ed. (London: Penguin Books, 1987), 112.

democracy would produce greater social justice. We had also expected the progress of science and technology would make mankind richer, and that this increasing wealth would gradually spread from a minority to a majority. We had expected that all this would happen peacefully. In fact we thought that mankind's course was set for an earthly paradise, and that our approach towards this goal was predestined for us by historical necessity.⁴

However, this optimism of Arnold Toynbee was shattered by the two World Wars. Toynbee concluded his voluminous *The Study of History* in the 1950s comparing twenty-one different world civilizations, saying,

If there was any validity in the writer's procedure of drawing comparisons between Hellenic history and Western, it would seem to follow that the Western society must, at any rate, be not immune from the possibility of a similar fate; and, when the writer, on passing to his wider studies, found that a clear majority of his assemblage of civilizations were already dead, he was bound to infer that death was indeed a possibility confronting every civilization, including his own.⁵

Toynbee's 'own civilization' is the European civilization which in various places of his work he identifies interchangeably with Western civilization or Western society. Arnold Toynbee also observes that civilizations and societies are always led by a small group of people whom he calls the "creative minority." The creative minority is responsible for effectively laying down the foundation of a civilization; it is also responsible to prevent or at least delay decline of civilizations. Toynbee recommended a cultivation of religious values in order to bring to a halt the decay of his civilization.

As the century advanced toward the end, the debate became increasingly lively among intellectuals. In the US various groups began to identify themselves as the creative minority. Conservatives turned to be at the forefront in this venture. Pointing out to these intellectual activities Stephen Tonsor, formerly of the University of Michigan, observes:

Out of these diverse strands of thought, these complex movements of ideas, the conservative movement at the end of the twentieth century has shaped itself. Important to its success was the patronage of a very few foundations and individuals who financially supported social and cultural criticism and innovation. This was possible, for it must be borne in mind that at their inception these groups were not overtly political. Their object was not political action. They saw themselves, rather, as a leaven in the great seething, bubbling mass of a democratic society. Politicians of both major parties betrayed and disappointed the hopes of these creative minorities.⁶

⁴ Arnold Toynbee, *Surviving the Future* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 106-107.

⁵ Arnold J. Toynbee, *A Study of History*, Abridgement by D.C. Sommervell (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), 912.

⁶ See for example, Stephen J. Tonsor, "Conservative as a Creative Minority," in *Modern Age* (Winter 1998), 14.

However, a greater disappointment to Tonsor was to follow: A number of political activists identifying themselves as neo-conservatives efficiently took advantage of the surfacing of the idea of the role of the creative minority in the life of a civilization and the role of a civilization in world politics: they hijacked the noble ideas of concerned intellectuals and appeared in international politics applying Machiavellian methodology to grab political power in the United States. They turned the theoretical formulation of clash of civilization thesis into a reality in international politics. Meanwhile in the academia the twentieth century which had begun with the study of ‘the world of nations’ as a unit of studying human history and society,⁷ now turned to the study of civilizations as a unit of the same study. The question of the clash of civilizations in the 21st century must be studied in this context.

Emergence of Islam and the Muslim World in the Frontline of International Politics

While Islam has always been recognized as a major world religion, the Muslim world was not a recognized political entity in the middle of the 20th century. Although Islam in history was understood to have contained strong political set of guidelines, it had little role in international politics. In fact there was a general tendency in Muslim countries such as Turkey, Iran, Pakistan and Egypt to follow in the footsteps of Europe to “modernize” their economies and societies. Witnessing this trend around the middle of the century, the British historian Bernard Lewis enthusiastically made a forecast that the idea of nationalism was going to sweep the Muslim world, and Islam as a political force was going to suffer the same fate as Christianity did in Europe in the 19th century. By referring to the mission of the Prophet of Islam, he said that, “Another such struggle is being fought in our own time - not against Al-Lat and Al-'Uzza (pre-Islamic objects of worship) - but a new set of idols called states, races, nations; this time it is the idols that seem to be victorious.”⁸ However within years in another article entitled “The Return of Islam” Lewis acknowledged the strength of Islam as a socio-political power and revised his thesis in 1976 noting that:

A Muslim Iraqi would feel far closer bonds with a non-Iraqi Muslim than with a non-Muslim Iraqi. Muslims of different countries, speaking different languages, share the same memories of a common and sacred past, the same awareness of corporate identity, the same sense of a common predicament and destiny. It is not nation or country which, as in the West, forms the historical basis of identity, but the religio-political community, and the imported Western idea of ethnic and territorial nationhood remains, like secularism, alien and incompletely assimilated.⁹

Lewis seemed to have been alarmed by the 1973 war (Ramadan/ Yom Kippur) in West Asia which was followed by a successful oil embargo against several pro-Israeli

⁷ See for example, Dankwart A. Rustow, *A World of Nations: Problems of Political Modernization* (Washington: The Brookings Institutions, 1967), and hundreds of other books dealing with the idea of nationalism published around the middle of the twentieth century.

⁸ Bernard Lewis, *The Middle East and the West*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967), 70.

⁹ Bernard Lewis, “The Return of Islam,” in *Commentary* (January 1976).

nations. Perhaps more alarming was the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979. Since then many books have been produced on a variety of topics and themes such as 'fundamentalist Islam', 'militant Islam', 'resurgent Islam', 'political Islam', 'Islamic revivalism'; all indicating renewed interest among Muslims in traditional Islamic ideas and values. In our opinion, however, the 'return' of Islam was not an unanticipated phenomenon; for, Islam never took a backseat in Muslim societies as did Christianity in 19th century Europe.¹⁰ Now the question is what is the connection between the so-called return of Islam of Bernard Lewis, recommendation of Toynbee and Nisbet for revival of religious values, and the innovation of the theory of the clash of civilizations? We shall now discuss this question.

Within years Bernard Lewis transformed his return of Islam thesis to a new thesis called the clash of civilizations. In an article entitled "The Roots of Muslim Rage" written in 1990 he formulated his argument as follows:

It should by now be clear that we are facing a mood and a movement far transcending the level of issues and policies and the governments that pursue them. This is no less than a clash of civilizations – the perhaps irrational but *surely historic reaction of an ancient rival against our Judeo-Christian heritage*, our secular present, and the worldwide expansion of both. It is crucially important that we on our side should not be provoked into an equally historic but also equally irrational reaction against that rival.¹¹

Lewis clearly defines the relationship between the Islamic and Western civilization as 'we' and 'they,' and in order to justify his thesis, he imposes this division on Muslims: he manipulates history of both Islamic and Western civilizations. He argues that Muslims believe in dividing the humanity into "themselves and others," and then he says that, "These definitions not only define the outsider but also, and perhaps more particularly, help to define and illustrate our perception of ourselves." In defining the Muslim understanding of the "other," his main aim is to develop a new interpretation of what constitutes the Western identity. In fact throughout the article Lewis' interest is to identify him (a Jewish born in Great Britain) with Western civilization and that the US (according to Lewis a daughter of Europe) as the flag bearer of Western civilization in the world today. Why is he so interested in identifying with the Western civilization? This is perhaps because Arnold Toynbee, a far well-known historian of Western civilization than Lewis, barely considered the Jews and the state of Israel as parts of Western civilization. On his part Lewis seems to have been interested in justifying an ever expanding Israel in international politics. As for the background of the expression Judeo-Christian tradition, a reference Lewis very conveniently approves is also misleading. For, there was no reference to Judeo-Christian heritage for the background of Western civilization till late 19th century. At the end of the 19th century Nietzsche used

¹⁰ On this subject, see Abdullah al-Ahsan, *Ummah or Nation: Identity Crisis in Contemporary Muslim Society*. Leicester: The Islamic Foundation: 1992.

¹¹ See the article Bernard Lewis, "The Roots of Muslim Rage," in *The Atlantic Monthly*. Vol. 266, No. 3 (September 1990), 47-60. The emphasis is added.

the phrase in a negative sense to criticize the lack of spiritual values in it. However, the use of the phrase was deliberately cultivated in order to neutralize Hitler's aggression against the Jews in Europe in the middle of the 20th century. It is also interesting to note that Lewis counsels his Western audience not to be provoked by "irrational reaction against that rival." Lewis seems to be exploiting the perceived superiority complex of some Western policy-makers.

Scholars have generally traced the setting of Western civilization rather to the Renaissance and the Enlightenment tradition. Particularly the founding fathers of the United States never considered the US a Christian country. In fact in one of the earliest formal international documents the US declared that:

As the Government of the United States of America is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion; as it has in itself no character of enmity against the laws, religion, or tranquillity, of Mussulmen; and, as the said States never entered into any war, or act of hostility against any Mahometan nation, it is declared by the parties, that no pretext arising from religious opinions, shall ever produce an interruption of the harmony existing between the two countries.¹²

However, our point of reference here is not a demonstration of cordial early Muslim-US friendship, but we would like to highlight the fact that the US was not founded on Judeo-Christian tradition of Europe. Also one should note that John Tyler, the mid-19th century American president whom Lewis quotes in his 1990 article to demonstrate American tolerance, identified Jews along with Muslims and East Indians as strangers to America. Tyler wanted to grant all immigrants an "abode among us." And yet in the article later Lewis would insist on himself and the state of Israel being a part of Western civilization. Yet one should note that following Lewis' article a galaxy of academicians, journalists and film makers followed Bernard Lewis in order to establish a clash of civilizations scenario in international politics. A concerted effort was introduced to achieve this goal. In the process Islam and the Muslim world moved to the center stage of international politics. What do the Muslims want? According to Lewis Muslim are enraged at Westerners and their "hatred is directed against us." He elaborates his thesis by stressing that since most Muslims want to revive the teachings of the Qur'an and the Prophet, they must have been directed by "a desire to reassert Muslim values and restore Muslim greatness" in the world today. Such "Muslim desire," of course, Lewis believes, would pose a serious threat to existing international order.

This was a shrewd move on the part of Bernard Lewis. Obviously with no reference to the conflict in Palestine which caused the 1973 war and the oil embargo that followed, and the unqualified US support for the former Iranian dictator that resulted to

¹² Article 11 in Treaty of Tripoli "authored by American diplomat Joel Barlow in 1796, the following treaty was sent to the floor of the Senate, June 7, 1797, where it was read aloud in its entirety and unanimously approved. John Adams, having seen the treaty, signed it and proudly proclaimed it to the Nation."

the mass revolution, common Americans would find fault with the Muslims who are, according to Lewis, “convinced of the superiority of their culture,” but “obsessed with the inferiority of their power.” The late Edward Said, former professor of literature at Columbia, rightly pointed out that Israel’s identification with Western civilization was done “in the hope that more Americans and Europeans will see Israel as a victim of Islamic violence.”¹³ This scheme has definitely been successful: many others around the globe joined to highlight the danger of the “Islamic threat.” Newspaper columnists, reporters, movie makers and even some novelists joined the academicians in a mission to demonstrate that “The Red Menace is Gone. But Here’s Islam.”¹⁴ Islam became a theme of discussion among the policy-makers and the media circle.

Huntington joined this debate with a justification for his *Weltanschauung* by quoting a novelist! Like Bernard Lewis, Huntington too argues for the need of an enemy in order to define self-identity. On his part, the novelist refers to a Venetian nationalist demagogue saying:

There can be no true friends without true enemies. Unless we hate what we are not, we cannot love what we are. These are the old truths we are painfully rediscovering ... Those who deny them deny their family their heritage, their culture, their birthright, their very selves! They will not lightly be forgiven.

Then Huntington expresses his conviction that, “the unfortunate truth in these old truths cannot be ignored by statesmen and scholars.”¹⁵ Although the argument seems naïve by scholarly standard, Huntington wants to cultivate the idea that “enemies are essential” for “people seeking identity.” He echoes Bernard Lewis in suggesting potential enemies of Western civilization. In the post-Soviet era Huntington identifies mainly Islamic and occasionally Chinese civilization as enemies of Western civilization. The events of September 11, 2001 came to support Huntington’s thesis. Both Lewis and Huntington extended the clash of civilization thesis further with more writings: Lewis wrote a series of books such as *What Went Wrong?: The Clash Between Islam and Modernity in the Middle East* (2002), *Roots of Muslim Rage* (2003), and *The Crisis of Islam: Holy War and Unholy Terror* (2003), and many articles, latest of which entitled “Muslims about to take over Europe” in the *Jerusalem Post* (January 29 2007). Huntington reiterated his thesis an article entitled “The Age of Muslim Wars” saying that, “throughout the Muslim world, ... there exists a great sense of grievance, resentment, envy and hostility toward the West and its wealth, power and culture.”¹⁶ With the support of the Bush administration and its allies the thesis seems to have become a reality in the early years of the 21st century. In order to understand Muslim “grievance” it is necessary to highlight some of Huntington’s observations about the Muslim world.

¹³ Edward Said, *Covering Islam*. 2nd ed. (NY: Vintage, 1996), xxi

¹⁴ See *Sunday New York Times* “Week in Review” came up with this headline in January 21, 1996. Although this specific issue was published in 1996, the real campaign had begun much earlier.

¹⁵ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. (NY: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 20.

¹⁶ Samuel P. Huntington, *Special Davos Edition Newsweek* (December 2001 – February 2002), 9.

Huntington's Observations about the Muslim World at the End of the 20th Century

Huntington believes that a war in our contemporary times involving the core states of the world's major civilizations is "highly improbable but not impossible." As he searches for enemies Huntington provokes his readers to imagine a possible scenario of a "global civilizational war" in which "the United States, Europe, Russia and India ...become engaged in a truly global struggle against China, Japan, and most of Islam" in the year 2010. Such a conflict may spark and escalate "if aspiring Muslim core states compete to provide assistance to their coreligionists."¹⁷ It should be noted however that even though Huntington puts China and Japan on the side of "most of Islam," the majority pages of his work talk about potentials for conflict between Muslims and the United States.

Why should "most of Islam" turn out against "the United States, Europe, Russia and India" in the "global civilizational war?" Because, Huntington believes, with the passage of time the Muslim world was becoming more Islamic and thus increasing the potential threat to Western civilization in international politics. He says:

Beginning in the 1970s, Islamic symbols, beliefs, practices, institutions, policies, and organizations won increasing commitment and support throughout the world of 1 billion Muslims stretching from Morocco to Indonesia and from Nigeria to Kazakhstan. ... In 1995 every country with predominantly Muslim population, ... was more Islamic and Islamist culturally, socially and politically than it was fifteen years ago.¹⁸

In response to these developments Muslim "political leaders rushed to identify their regimes and themselves with Islam," observes Huntington. He says:

King Hussein of Jordan, convinced that secular governments had little future in the Arab world, spoke of the need to create "Islamic democracy" and a "modernizing Islam." King Hassan of Morocco emphasized his descent from the Prophet and his role as "Commander of the faithful." The Sultan of Brunei, not previously noted for Islamic practices, became "increasingly devout" and defined his regime as a "Malay Muslim monarchy." Ben Ali of Tunisia began regularly to invoke Allah in his speeches and "wrapped himself in the mantle of Islam" to check the growing appeal of Islamic groups. In the early 1990s Suharto explicitly adopted a policy of becoming "more Muslim." In Bangladesh the principle of "secularism" was dropped from the constitution in the mid 1970s, and by early 1990s the secular, Kemalist identity of Turkey was, for the first time, coming

¹⁷ Huntington, *Clash*. 312-318.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* 111.

under serious challenge. To underline their Islamic commitment, governmental leaders – Ozal, Suharto, Karimov – hastened to their *hajh*.¹⁹

It is interesting to note that Huntington fails to record Saddam Hussain's introduction of the inscription "*Allahu Akbar*" in Iraq's national flag. He also fails to note the assumption of the Saudi King Fahd ibn Abdul Aziz' the title *Khadim al-Haramain* ((custodian of the two sacred mosques) to demonstrate his commitment to Islam. Huntington seems to approve these superficial and Machiavellian manifestations of "Islamic commitments" by governmental leaders in the Muslim world. A general discussion on the current state of affairs in the Muslim world is not within the scope of this paper, but it is important that we examine the authenticity of Huntington's argument.

In order to convince his readers of the violent nature of the relationship between Islamic and Western civilizations, Huntington quotes Bernard Lewis, "a leading Western scholar of Islam," and argues that there exists "no less than a clash of civilizations." He provides empirical data from history: He says, "50 percent of wars involving pairs of states of different religions between 1820 and 1929 were wars between Muslims and Christians."²⁰ Academically this argument is extremely trivial: this was a colonial period in world history where most of Africa and Asia were occupied by European powers and it was only incidental that most of Europe supposedly followed Christianity (supposedly because most Europeans followed no organized religion during the latter half of the 19th century) and most of Africa and Asia was populated by Muslims. History books have recorded these wars as colonial or nationalist wars and struggles for national self-determination. History has also recorded that one of the major contributions of the United States to world civilization is that the US has advanced the idea of self determination in world politics. The US has hard-pressed the world bodies such as the League of Nations and the United Nations undertake the diplomacy of decolonization in the 20th century.²¹ Huntington now seems to want the United States to abandon its historical role for the Enlightenment values such as freedom of conscience and respect for human dignity and to assume the burden of historical Christendom of Europe.

In support of his controversial thesis Huntington argues:

[i]t is hard to find statements by any Muslims, whether politicians, officials, academics, businesspersons, or journalists, praising Western values and institutions. They instead stress the differences between their civilization and Western civilization, the superiority of their culture, and the need to maintain the integrity of that culture against Western onslaught. Muslims fear and resent

¹⁹ Ibid. 115.

²⁰ Ibid, 210. It is interesting that Huntington finds 50 percent of wars involving Muslims and Christians during this period. However he forgets that during this most volatile century in 14 centuries of Christian-Muslim relations followers of these two major world religions constituted at least 70 to 75 percent of the world population. It is also noteworthy that out of current 192 member states of the United Nations at least 169 have clear of either Christian or Muslim or combination of both.

²¹ Although the US never officially joined the world body, President Woodrow Wilson's idea of national self-determination laid down the foundation of the League of Nations.

Western power and the threat which this poses to their society and beliefs. They see Western culture as materialistic, corrupt, decadent, and immoral.²²

Huntington believes that since “1979 Iranian Revolution, an intercivilizational quasi war developed between Islam and the West,”²³ and in the near future “conceivably even more intensely anti-Western nationalisms could emerge, blaming the West for the failures of Islam.”²⁴ Therefore, there is strong likelihood of a perpetual conflict between the two civilizations. Because the essential “problem for the West is not Islamic fundamentalism. It is Islam, a different civilization whose people are convinced of the superiority of their culture and are obsessed with the inferiority of their power.”²⁵ We shall now examine the accuracy of Huntington’s thesis.

Is there really a Clash of between Islamic and Western Civilizations?

We raise questions about the validity of Huntington’s thesis because his ideas are based on wrong premise. In order to demonstrate his thesis Huntington manipulates history of both civilizations. Introducing the discussion on “Islam and West” during the Clinton administration, Huntington suggests that:

Some Westerners, including President Bill Clinton, have argued that the West does not have problems with Islam but only with violent Islamist extremists. Fourteen hundred years of history demonstrate otherwise. The relations between Islam and Christianity, both Orthodox and Western, have often been stormy. Each has been the other’s Other.²⁶

Huntington’s knowledge of history of both Islamic and Western civilization seems to be shallow. A through analysis of the relationship between Islam and Christianity is not within the scope of this paper. But Huntington’s claims demand some reflections from history. Anybody with the simple knowledge of the *Qur’an* and Islamic history knows that the *Qur’an* does not single out Christians as enemies of Muslims. In fact the *Qur’an* encouraged friendly relations with Christians not only because the Christians believed in the existence of God, but also they believed in many prophets in history. In fact when persecuted by their fellow tribesmen early Muslims sought refuge with the Christian king of Ethiopia. The *Qur’an* also favored the Byzantine Christians in their clash against the Persians. In this context one may refer to an academically more sound work by Columbia professor Richard Bulliet *The Case for Islamo-Christian Civilization* which argues a closer relation between Islam and Christianity in history than Bernard Lewis’ “Judeo-Christian heritage.”²⁷ However, one needs to examine Huntington’s proposition that

²² Ibid. 213.

²³ Ibid. 216.

²⁴ Ibid. 121.

²⁵ Ibid. 217.

²⁶ Ibid, 209.

²⁷ Richard W. Bulliet, *The Case for Islamo-Christian Civilization*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

Christians and Muslims constitute “the other’s Other.” Let us first discuss the proposed thesis more closely.

In fact the Qur’an doesn’t identify any religious, linguistic or ethnic group as enemy; rather it strongly condemns those who hide the truth of the existence of One Lord and those who attempt to become lord over others. The Qur’an claims that these people spread corruption on earth in order to establish their lordship mainly over the poor and weak. It is well-known that the earliest enemies of Islam were the Prophet’s own ethnic and linguistic fellow tribesmen – the Qureish. The message of Islam attracted followers not only from the Qureish, but from various groups of people including Africans and Persians living in Arabia. In other words Islam’s message was universal and therefore, both its followers and opponents were common. This is not to suggest that no Muslim ruler in history considered Christians as enemies; rather this is to suggest that there has not been any specific “Other” for Islam.

Also it is not true that Muslims always constituted the “Other” for Christians. Christianity was born as a reform movement within the Jewish tradition and the two communities became other’s other during the early days of Christianity. Huntington romanticizes Christian history by suggesting that the “twentieth-century conflict between liberal democracy and Marxist-Leninism is only a fleeting and superficial historical phenomenon compared to the continuing and deeply conflictual relation between Islam and Christianity.”²⁸ Perhaps the Cold war was too contemporary to be erased from the memory of his readers. But should one obliterate the memories of the Crusades against Orthodox Christians? Who fought the Hundred Years War (1337-1453), and the Thirty Year’s War (1618-1648)? Who were the main participating forces in the two devastating world wars in the 20th century?

Most amazing is the fact that Huntington ignores the motivating factors behind the American war of independence. There has been an explosion of references to the Judeo-Christian heritage of the American republic during the past decade or so. But the fact is that like many Enlightenment philosophers the founding fathers of America were religious but vehemently anti-clerical. Of course the founding fathers might have learned about the principles of human rights and human dignity from Judaism and Christianity, which in fact, constituted the fundamental forces of their motivation. But these ideas are not only common to classical Greek tradition of Socrates and Plato, which Renaissance attempted to revive, but to Islam as well. How can a student of history fail to notice these facts! However, this is not to suggest that there hasn’t been any conflict between Muslims and Christians during the last fourteen hundred years of history; rather, this is to argue that Muslims and Christians have not been each other’s “Other” throughout history as has been suggested by Huntington.

What was the general pattern of the conflict between Islam and European Christendom in history? Again an in-depth analysis doesn’t fall within the scope of this paper, but for the sake of our argument we shall formulate some observations on the issue. In fourteen hundred yours of history one will definitely find faults with both

²⁸ Huntington, *Clash*, 209.

parties. Invasions and incursions by one to other's territories have occurred. For very unfortunate events such as the atrocities committed by the Crusaders during the occupation of Jerusalem in 1096 have occurred; but later the Catholic Church has admitted its mistakes. As for the relationship during the European colonial penetration into the Muslim world, most European historians now acknowledge the inhuman and savage penetration pattern of the European colonizers into Asia and Africa. Huntington's claim that Muslims possess a "sense of grievance, resentment, envy and hostility toward the West and its wealth" is disgusting. Huntington doesn't provide any evidence to support this accusation. If any Muslim resentment against European colonizers exists, that must be viewed in the proper historical context. In fact one will find some resentment among all Muslim and non-Muslim victims of European colonization and that is because of the colonial plunder of their territories by the colonizers. Describing the British plunder of wealth after the occupation of Muslim Bengal in 1757 one British historian noted that, "men made fortunes, returned to England, lost them and returned to India for more."²⁹ This was on top of millions of pounds worth of valuables and goods transferred by the East India Company, the official colonizer of the territory. That is why one needs to highlight the point here that the conflict between European colonizers and Muslims of Asia and Africa originated during the latter's struggle for freedom and self-determination, and not because of the "wealth, power, and culture" of the former. In fact pre-colonial Africa and Asia were much wealthier than post-colonial Africa and Asia.

Now returning to the question – whether or not a clash of civilizations exists in international politics today – at the outset most observers of current affairs will come up with a positive answer. This is mainly because of Bush Administration's policy toward the Muslim world. The "neo-conservatives" in the Bush Administration seem to have accepted Lewis and Huntington's twisted history to suit their desire to impose hegemony in various parts of the world. The events of September 11, 2001 seem to have come to support their design. The introduction of the Homeland Security Act of 2002, the rise of terrorist activities in various parts of the world, the stringent policies of the Bush Administration and a number of European countries toward Palestine, Iraq, Afghanistan and Somalia, and also because of policy toward Muslim charity organizations and travel restrictions on certain Muslim individuals have convinced many observers to conclude that this is happening because of a clash of civilizations in the world today. Yet if one examines some other developments and ponders upon the situation deeply, one finds many moderate voices around the world. For example, millions of Americans and Europeans came out on the streets opposing the invasion of Iraq in 2003. The opposition to continuous occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan is increasing not only in the Muslim world, but in Europe and America. It is highly unlikely that they would have done this had they believed in the idea of the clash of civilizations. Also the American voters have expressed their opposition to Bush Administration's Iraq policy in the mid-term election in 2006 and the general elections in 2008. Clearly these voters chose to express their displeasure with administration's foreign policy and out of their motivation and commitments to fundamental values of the US constitution. By challenging the clash of

²⁹ Percival Spear, *The Oxford History of India* 4th ed. (Delhi, London: Oxford University Press, 1958), 474.

civilizations thesis the new administration seems to be going ahead to close down the infamous Guantanamo prison.

On the occasion of the arrest of six Muslim imams at Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport in November 2006 Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee, a senior member of the House Homeland Security Committee, said in an official statement that, "The Muslim American Community has grown in size and prominence, and is an integral part of the fabric of this nation. Muslim Americans share the same values and ideals that make this nation great: Ideals such as discipline, generosity, peace and moderation." She also said that, "Securing our homeland and protecting our national security is a paramount national concern. But the tragedy of 9/11 cannot be permitted to be used to justify racial profiling, harassment, and discrimination of Muslim and Arab Americans. Such Conduct is not only deplorable but also undermines our civil liberties and impedes our success in the global war on terror." Therefore Huntington's argument that "the clash of civilizations is tribal conflict on a global scale" is not a valid argument. Yet in international politics Huntington's suggestion that a "war between groups from different civilizations, most likely involving Muslims on one side and non-Muslims on the other"³⁰ seem to dominate the mind of many academicians, journalists and policy makers. However, we would like to believe that human beings have become more civilized with the passage of time, and like Sheila Jackson Lee they wouldn't subscribe to tribalism, rather they would subscribe to common civilizational values to save the humanity.³¹

Alternatives to the Clash of Civilizations Scenario

Under such circumstances the first question that arises as to whether or not it would at all be possible to ensure world peace in the 21st century with a hostile relationship between these two major communities in the world today. Will the United States decide to serve the interests of historical Christendom of Europe? Or the US will follow the rational values of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment as held by the founding fathers? Will the US constitution and the American people allow a perpetual conflict among civilizations? Also will it be possible to enslave the entire Muslim community? Or will it be possible to exterminate them like the Aborigines and the so-called American Indians? Will the United States or any other coalition of states be able to establish world peace without the participation of almost a quarter of world population? Consider the geographical distribution of Muslims in the world today. On top of the world's most known fuel deposits, most important trade routes – the Mediterranean, the Red Sea, the Bosphorus, the Black Sea the Straits of Malacca – are all heavily Muslim populated areas. Even if one ignores the humanitarian argument, i.e., the Muslim right to self-determination, how could the rest of the world establish a peaceful atmosphere by ignoring such a large and diverse community? What is the alternative then? To create privileged elites among Muslims who would abandon interests of the common people and who would be loyal to the privileged elite in Europe and America? In our opinion, such Machiavellian efforts have already failed. And any continuation of such efforts will only

³⁰ Huntington, *Clash*, 312.

³¹ In this context Collin Powell's question "what was wrong for a Muslim to the president of the United States" in response to another question whether or not Barack Obama was a Muslim is noteworthy.

encourage desperate Muslims to subscribe to terrorism.³² That is why it is essential for concerned and caring individuals to discuss how to ensure civilizational co-existence in the 21st century. In the present context we shall confine our discussion only on the relationship between Islamic and Western civilizations.

First of all, one must recognize the fact that there is a problem of understanding of one by the other. In order to develop a relationship of peaceful co-existence, therefore, one needs to identify common values between the two civilizations. As many Christians today find common values between the Enlightenment and Judeo-Christian traditions, one would also find those values common in Islamic civilization as well. Both civilizations then would need to cultivate those values in their practical life; both will need to admit that they have made mistakes in the past, and there is a need to make a determined and concerted effort to correct those mistakes. Any potential conflict between the values of these two civilizations must be resolved rationally to the satisfaction of both groups. Nations belonging to both civilizations will need to place these values above their national, ethnic, and linguistic, and racial interests. And this will be possible only through dialogue and discussion, as has been suggested by Immanuel Wallerstein.³³

One should be more realistic about these dialogues and discussions, however. Currently perhaps hundreds of conferences and seminars are being held all over the world on inter-civilizational and inter-faith issues. Academicians, policy-makers, NGO-activists are taking part in these discussions extensively, but they are not producing expected results. Therefore at this stage one must examine the outcome of these gatherings. In our opinion gaining of mutual trust should have been an essential effect of these discourses. Any observer of international affairs would admit that the conflict in Palestine is one of the major obstacles in to developing better relations between the two civilizations. But conditions of Palestinians in occupied territories are constantly deteriorating. If international observers with proper peace-keeping mandate under the banner of the UN could be deployed in the zone of conflict in Palestine, and if Israel could be persuaded to respect the UN resolutions and the presence of UN agencies in Palestine, stop building settlements and houses in occupied territories, some signs of an improved international situation would have occurred immediately. However, nothing of that sort seems to be happening. Concerned members of the world community must design plans keeping these realities in mind.

Mutual trust between the members of two civilizations demands honesty and transparency in dealing with international issues. These are common values of both civilizations and yet the Bush Administration has launched a “war on terror” without producing its terror evidences in public. As a result very few people trust in official versions of terror threats.³⁴ Opinion polls in Muslim countries demonstrate strong

³² See the statement of Ayman az-Zawahiri in *As-Sharq al-Awsat*, September 7, 2001. The author explains the position of their group in number articles published in the same paper.

³³ Immanuel Wallerstein, “Islam, the West, and the World,” in *Journal of Islamic Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (May 1999), 125.

³⁴ One may find numerous stories and documents in various internet sites such as You Tube and Google challenging the official version of 9/11 terror attack.

resentment to the official version of 9/11 plot. On the other hand since September 11, 2001 the number of terror activities has been steadily increasing every year. These serious threats to international law and order must be addressed immediately.

People belonging to both civilizations will need to give up the Social Darwinist superiority complex. The idea that third world nations are destined to suffer from poverty, malnutrition, disease and other calamities because they lack the intellectual ability to overcome those problems must be abandoned. One must recognize that colonialism played the most effective role in the growth of the current relationship of dependency between the developed and developing nations of the world today. Universal human rights and human dignity must be recognized *universally*; not just on paper, but also in practice. Many Muslims identify double standards by many Western governments in their treatment of Israel as opposed to Iraq and a number of Muslim and non-Western countries. Both Iraq and Israel have violated UN resolutions but only the former has been punished by the international body while Israel has been allowed to flout the world body. People in the Muslim world also must give up the belief that Muslims are the only people who deserve Divine favor. They should rather let God decide who should receive His mercy. In order to comprehend the situation better Muslims should develop a deeper understanding of the political systems in Western countries. Muslims need to understand that Western democracies sometimes allow lobby groups to campaign for specific issues and may receive government's support even though they may not go through proper legislation process. Specifically policies toward Israel are not always supported by the public opinion in those countries. Muslims must also appreciate the fact that there are millions of people in the West, who might not be Muslim, but equally care for justice and human rights of the Palestinians. They should also note that in the current Iraqi crisis more Westerners have come out to demonstrate their opposition to aggression against Iraq as compared to Muslims. Western civil society groups such as the US based *International Solidarity Movement* and *Ifamericansknew.org* has stood firmly against hegemonic rule of the Bush Administration. Also many Western organizations such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, *Medecins Sans Frontiers*, and Transparency International are functioning on basis of universal human values, and thus have challenged many policies of Bush Administration. Most Muslims do not seem to appreciate sacrifices made by these groups for international peace and justice.

This brings us to the question of democracy: Democracy has been claimed to be one of the fundamental values of Western civilization. Yet when in 1991 the military in Algeria, with the support of its colonial master France, brought down the democratically elected government, neither the Algerian military nor the government of France was severely criticized by other Western countries. On the other hand Iran – which has been holding elections regularly since the Islamic revolution in 1979 – is still black listed as belonging to the “axis of evil.” Also “democratic elections” held in Egypt under emergency rule of President Mubarak are generally approved by most Western countries. One finds the most striking inconsistency in the elections held in Palestine: In spite of the high rate of approval by most western observers about the accuracy of the election results, powerful western countries have refused to recognize the Hamas led government in Palestine.

The problem of double standard and the gap between words and deeds exist not only among some Western governments, but among Muslim governments as well. Muslim governments, NGOs and individuals are generally very vocal against Israeli aggression, but do they react in the same manner when Muslim countries behave aggressively. Many Muslim countries sided with Iraq during the Iran-Iraq conflict of the 1980s. They never protested against Iraq's aggressive behavior and its use of chemical weapons against Iran. Did any Muslim government protest when in 1982 the Syrian government killed thousands of innocent people in Hama? Muslims protested very strongly when an Israeli reservist killed many Muslims engaged in prayers in the Ibrahim mosque in Hebron (Al-Khalil). However, similar killings have become a common phenomenon between *Shi'a* and *Sunni* Muslims in Pakistan for over a decade, and now they have become daily phenomena in Iraq and yet hardly any effective action has been taken against such attacks. Interestingly these killings have not been criticized as severely as have been the killings by Israelis. Also many Muslims do not seem to appreciate the fact that many of their coreligionists have found refuge in many Western countries after being persecuted by their own governments. These clear cases of double standards must be resolved in order to develop any better understanding between two civilizations.

After developing a better understanding about each other, people belonging to both civilizations will need to minimize the gap between the elite and the common people in their respective countries. The elite-mass gap in many Muslim countries has dipped into very low ebb. For a long time public opinion in Saudi Arabia, for example, has been against allowing the US a base to initiate aggression against Afghanistan and Iraq or any other Muslim country. But the ruling elite in Muslim countries have not been able to follow this up. As a result the legitimacy of the elite suffers, and the United States hardly wants to understand this dilemma of the Muslim ruling elite. Pakistan, for example, is heavily indebted to the World Bank, IMF, and to a number of other international private banks, the United States has been exploiting this weakness of Pakistan to gather Pakistan's support against what it calls terrorist establishments in Pakistan and Afghanistan or for Pakistan's support in the Security Council on Iraq in 2003. The US may call these activities diplomatic maneuver, but in the eyes of common Pakistanis they might just be considered as undue pressure.

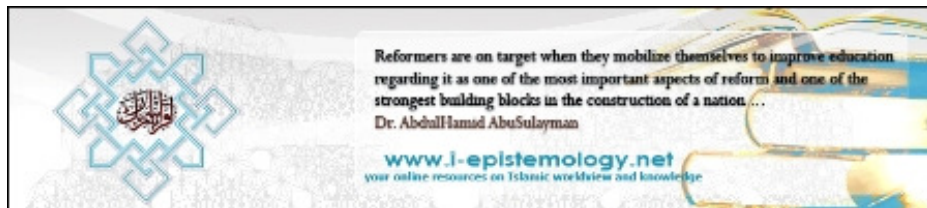
The discrepancy between words and deeds exists not only in the Muslim world, but it also exists in the US. The question of Palestine has already been highlighted; one may find discrepancies in areas of US foreign relations. Similarly on the issue of the environment, the US government has broken its commitments. The US government seems to have made this decision to protect interests of large industries. Any genuine democratic government would have put such critical issues on national referendum. But the Bush administration doesn't seem to have any such motive. Such role of the leading nation in the contemporary world could only lead to disaster for human civilization in the 21st century.

Huntington has correctly highlighted the fact that many Muslims blame “Western culture as materialistic, corrupt, decadent, and immoral.” But as we have noted earlier in the introduction to this essay, major Western scholars of history such as Arnold Toynbee and Robert Nisbet also have noted the negative impact of materialism, corruption and decadence in Western civilization. Both Toynbee and Nisbet have recommended absorption of religious and spiritual values for saving the decadent Western civilization. Can Islam contribute to find any answer to this concern?

On the outset to this query one may raise another question – should Islam be able to contribute anything on the question of how to save a decadent civilization then why it hasn’t done so to save its own? This is a valid question. But let us take the suggestion on its face value. The Qur’an claims itself to be a book of guidance for mankind (2: 185). From the Qur’anic perspective the human beings have been created neither with any form of sin nor with a so-called clean slate; rather with best of molds (95:4) and God’s His own spirit (15:29, 38:72). The Enlightenment philosophers have debated this issue without reaching to any consensus. The Qur’an also suggests that, an innate goodness has been ingrained into the human nature, but human beings are also prone to make mistakes and commit crimes; for they have been created desirous, forgetful, greedy and weak. The Qur’an seems to suggest a pathway of human life that walks between the ideas of Rousseau (1712-1778) and Edmund Burke (1729-1797). According to the Qur’an human life is for a test: they act positively, they contribute to civilization; they act negatively, they harm civilization. During the past two hundred years social science has made wonderful progress in understanding the human nature. Shouldn’t the social scientists now reevaluate their findings in the light of the fate of the Western civilization on the one hand and the Qur’anic teachings on the other?

It is interesting to note that even though social scientists have generally held religion as individual matter; historians have identified a prominent role of religion in the life of all civilizations in history. But historians have also been skeptical about the role of religion in society because of the exploitation of religious ideas by the clergy: “*And mix not truth with falsehood, nor conceal the truth while you know*” (2: 42) and “*Then woe to those who write the book with their own hands, and then say: ‘This is from Allah,’ to traffic with it for a miserable price...*” (2:79). Have the Muslim scholars also behaved the same way with the Qur’anic teachings? Responsibility to examine this also falls of Muslim scholars. However, the Qur’an puts the responsibility to save the civilization to mankind alone: for God doesn’t change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves (13: 11). The Qur’an doesn’t identify Arabs, Persians, Englishmen, or Americans for God’s favor: It gives universal principles. Whoever takes the initiative and follows God’s guidance will receive His favor. Various groups – Arabs, Persians, Turks and many others – have benefited from the Qur’anic values and attained leadership position in history. Can the humanity as a whole undertake this task? However such a proposition raises a fundamental question – will everybody require converting to Islam in order to benefit from the Qur’anic values? In our humble opinion the answer is no. Here one may cite the views and admiration of the Qur’an by renowned orientalist such English Arthur J. Arberry, German Annmarie Schimmel and Canadian W. Canwell Smith. None of these orientalist had converted to Islam.

The clash of civilization scenario should be a matter of great concern not only for members of Islamic and Western civilizations; it is alarming for the whole of mankind. Because of the revolutionary growth of communication the world has turned to a global village. Therefore any action for the future of humanity must be undertaken by the whole of humanity.



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