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THE CLASH OF CIVILIZATIONS: AN ISLAMICIST'S CRITIQUE

The twentieth century has had two great prophet-philosophers of history, Spengler and Toynbee. Each of them spoke to the West about its future after a major change in circumstance, prophesied for the West on the basis of a long historical view of the destiny of civilizations, and led careers that spanned the world of scholarship and public policy. Both of them, Spengler and Toynbee, started out as historians but came to despise their fellow professional colleagues as narrow-minded slaves of detail who made niggling objections to their larger schemes. Now, Samuel Huntington, a political scientist who has plunged into history, seems ready to join this pantheon. In his celebrated article, "The Clash of Civilizations," soon to be published in expanded form as a book, Huntington also reflects on the course of civilizations, past and, more especially, future. As a by-product he has given the United States of the 1990s what it most desires: a principle with which to make order of the post-Cold War era, and a sense of purpose. It is, moreover, a testimony to the protean creativity of its highly intelligent author that he has not fallen captive to the "scientism" that has fostered so many arid debates in the discussion of foreign policy. The "clash of civilizations" thesis has also strengthened the reintroduction of culture into the discussion of politics; the development theories of the 1960s, which heavily discounted culture, now seem sadly naive.[1]

As a historian, I very much hope that Samuel Huntington will remain an empiricist and care about detail. Ultimately, Spengler's contempt for empiricism made him an honorable but largely irrelevant episode in twentieth century thought. Toynbee, who maintained throughout that he was an empiricist and tried mightily to be civil to his professional detractors, could not accommodate, or even take in, the many (largely empirical) criticisms of his work; and the judgement of most professional historians was summed up by the English historian John Kenyon, who wrote that "the great Toynbee Cult, which some had seen as an indirect threat to Western civilization, proved less enduring and no more significant in the long run than the similar Tolkien Cult."[2]

The heart of the Huntington thesis lies precisely in the claim, based on a trend which Professor Huntington attempts to establish empirically, that, in a new phase of world politics, culture will be the mainspring of the great divisions among peoples and the "dominating" source of international conflict. According to Huntington (who is strongly influenced by Toynbee's categorization of civilizations), at present the major civilizations are the Western, Confucian, Japanese, Islamic, Hindu, Slavic-Orthodox, Latin-American, and—possibly—African. "Western ideas of individualism, liberalism, constitutionalism, human rights, equality, liberty, the rule of law, democracy, free markets, and the separation of church and state often have little resonance in Islamic, Confucian, Japanese, Hindu, Buddhist or Orthodox cultures." (It is interesting that Buddhism appears as a fugitive category throughout the article.) The policy implications are clear: "The fault lines of civilizations are the battle lines of the future." The West must be accommodating to "alien" civilizations, if possible, but confrontational if necessary. For this purpose the United States must forge alliances with similar cultures. Whereas Huntington hopes to "incorporate" into the West societies in Eastern Europe and Latin America, there is—apparently—no such hope in the near future for the rest of the non-West. In the case of the Confucian and Islamic world, the West must "limit" the expansion of their military strength by, among other measures,

maintaining "military superiority in East and Southwest Asia," and by seeking "to exploit differences and conflicts among Confucian and Islamic states." But, in the final analysis, "all civilizations should learn to tolerate each other."

Huntington's thesis is arresting because it offers a broad picture of world events that seems to be supported by a wealth of examples. Yet for an Islamicist—a scholar whose primary interest touches in some way on the Islamic world—some of the examples taken from the Islamic world are far more ambiguous than they first appear, and counter-examples seem to be abundantly to hand. Not only is the "empirical" basis of the thesis a matter for dispute, but the theoretical structure proposed to explain the relation between "culture" and political behavior seems to the present author very much open to question. And, unfortunately, some of these examples are presented in a way that unwittingly panders to the less constructive stereotypes of the history of the non-Western world.

For example, in his capsule history of the Islamic world Huntington tells us that after "the Arab and Moorish surge west and north,... the Crusaders attempted with temporary success to bring Christianity and Christian rule to the Holy Land." As Professor Huntington knows but the less informed reader of this sentence may forget, the Crusaders could not bring Christianity to the Holy land because Christianity continued to exist (and profit from Christian pilgrimage) both in the Holy Land and in the rest of the Middle East because of the principle of tolerance toward Christians (as well as Jews) in Islamic law. As often as not, the indigenous Christians of the Holy Land found Crusader Christian presence a burden since the Crusaders could be extremely intolerant of the indigenous Christian groups present there.

Huntington continues his history of the relations of the Islamic world and the West by giving an accurate summary of the relations between the Arab world (with one reference to Iran) and the West. He then concludes: "This warfare between Arabs and the West culminated in 1990, when the United States sent a massive army to the Persian Gulf... ."(Of course, the Egyptians, the Syrians, the Saudis and other members of the Gulf

Cooperation Council, Arab nations with a collective population many times Iraq's population, also sent troops.) "This centuries-old military interaction between the West and Islam is unlikely to decline. It could become virulent." While there have been efforts to introduce democracy, "the principle beneficiaries of these openings have been Islamist movements. In the Arab world, in short, Western democracy strengthens anti-Western political forces. This may be a passing phenomenon, but it surely complicates relations between Islamic countries and the West."

Of course Professor Huntington, in spite of the alternation between "Arab" and "Islamic" in these paragraphs, knows that the categories "Arab" and "Muslim" do not even approximately overlap. At the very most one in five Muslims is an Arab. (The Arab nations claim a population of about two hundred million out of the world's approximately one billion Muslims, but this number includes several millions of Berbers and Kurds. It also, incidently, includes at least fifteen million Christian Arabs, some of whom, such as George Habash, the leader of the PFLP, are considerably less sympathetic to the West than a Muslim such as Yasir Arafat.) Therefore, a summary history of the hostilities between the Arab world and the West by itself can hardly support the conclusion that "this centuries-old military interaction between the West and Islam is unlikely to decline." In fact, even if we were to concentrate only on the Mediterranean world and disregard such peripheral matters as the British conquest of Moghul India and the Dutch conquest of Indonesia, the most important conflict between Christians and Muslims of the past five centuries of Mediterranean history would seem to be the West's struggle with the Ottoman Turks, hardly an "Arab" opponent.

Yet an important intellectual problem is raised by the conflation of Arabs and Muslims at the conclusion of this summary history: "In the Arab world, in short, Western democracy strengthens anti-Western forces. This may be a passing phenomenon, but it surely complicates relations between Islamic countries and the West." Professor Huntington's idea of civilization is such that other Muslims should behave the way Muslim Arabs behave—but they do not. In early 1996, the two

non-Arab parliamentary democracies in Muslim lands led by women prime ministers—Pakistan and Bangladesh—alone had a combined population of approximately two hundred and twenty million, significantly larger than that of the Arab world. Turkey, a parliamentary democracy until recently also led by a woman prime minister, has a population of sixty million. Is it possible that, in spite of being fellow Muslims, the Muslims of South Asia and the Muslims of Turkey have a different political culture than Arab Muslims? I believe the case that they do have such individual political cultures to be overwhelming.

Even within the Arab world the principal beneficiaries of democratic openings have not always been the Islamists: Hasan Turabi, the Islamist ideologue of the present government of the Sudan, was unable to win a parliamentary seat when that country had a democratic system. Other Islamic countries offer many parallels: in Pakistan, for example, Islamists rode high under the authoritarian rule of Zia ul-Haq but have done poorly in popular elections both before and after his time.

Huntington, in fleshing out his theory of "the bloody borders" of Islam, tells us that in Africa the conflict between "Arab Islamic" civilization and the non-Islamic peoples to the south, in the past "epitomized in the image of the Arab slave dealers and black slaves," is now "reflected in the on-going civil war in the Sudan between Arabs and blacks, the fighting in Chad between Libyan-supported insurgents and the government, the tension between Orthodox Christians and Muslims in the Horn of Africa, and ... [the] conflicts ... between Muslims and Christians in Nigeria." But the Ethiopians, the only substantial Christian community near the Horn of Africa, are Monophysite, a variety of Christians once vigorously persecuted and still regarded as scandalously heretical by the Eastern Orthodox. In Chad, Goukouni Weddeye, a Muslim, received Libyan support, while his Muslim opponent Hissein Habré was supported by Sudan, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia as well as the United States. At certain stages, Libyan-backed Goukouni Weddeye had more sympathy in the non-Muslim south than his opponent, the anti-Libyan Habré, who had to reconquer the south before he drove the Libyans from the north. As one scholar of Libyan and

Chadian affairs has remarked, while feelings among Muslims were a factor in the outbreak of civil war in Chad, "Islam proved a remarkably feeble counterweight to the divisive forces of ethnicity and regionalism."[3] As for the Arabs of the Sudan (which in Arabic means "land of the blacks"), they are in majority black by the understanding of the (admittedly artificial) racial categories used in the United States and Egypt, something that only victims of stereotypes about "white" Arab slave traders would forget. The "communal violence" between Muslims and Christians in Nigeria to which Huntington refers is very real but at present it is far overshadowed by the conflict between Mashood Abiola, the Yoruba Muslim from the south who won at the polls in 1992, and the military government, dominated in part by Muslims of the north, which cancelled the result of those elections.

"On the northern border of Islam," Professor Huntington tells us, "conflict has increasingly erupted between Orthodox and Muslim peoples." Included in this formula is the "simmering violence between Serb and Albanian," Albanians being an overwhelmingly Muslim people. This "simmer" seems at the moment partly to consist of fuel sales, including jet fuel, to the officially embargoed Serbs by Albania, which is selling more oil to the Serbs than all other sources combined.[4] And, real as the historical antipathy between the Serbs and Albanians may be, it is no less real than the antipathy that simmers between the Orthodox Slavs and Orthodox Greeks in neighboring Macedonia.

For the Caucasus Professor Huntington offers us two examples of the Orthodox-Muslim conflict: one is "the violence between Ossetians and Ingush, and the other the unremitting slaughter of each other by Armenians and Azeris." While including the not very important example of the Muslim Ingush and the Ossetes, who are in majority Orthodox (although with a twenty to thirty percent Muslim minority), Professor Huntington neglects many far more important counterexamples. Under Gamsakhurdia's presidency, (Orthodox) Georgia waged a bloody war against its (largely Orthodox) Ossetian minority. Since Shevardnadze assumed leadership of Georgia in 1992

there have been efforts (not altogether successful) to heal this rift; but meanwhile (Orthodox) Russia has helped the (largely Muslim) Abkhazians to declare themselves independent of (Orthodox) Georgia. No surprise that Georgia has felt more sympathy to (Muslim) Azerbaijan, which has been resistant to Russian influence. No surprise, either, that Iran—the archetypal Muslim state in Western thinking—has been so careful to be neutral in the struggle between Christian Armenians and Muslim Azerbaijanis, since Iran wishes to discourage Azerbaijani separatists within its own borders and sees friendship with Russia as a key to its foreign policy. Orthodox Russia, Christian Armenia—the majority of whose population has, for over a millennium, totally rejected the authority of the Orthodox churches as normally understood—and Islamic Iran are emerging as covert allies in Caucasian affairs.[5]

Central Asia is another arena in which Muslim-Orthodox differences have a weak explanatory power. Iran has joined Russia and India in strongly backing the Rabbani government in Kabul against the more "Islamist" forces of the Taliban in Afghanistan. By and large Iran has not helped Muslim religious rebels in Tajikistan, where it could have great influence because of shared language, but has restricted its dealings to the pro-Russian official government. To view the relations of (Orthodox) Russia with its Caucasian and Central Asian neighbors, or even to view the relations between these neighbors as primarily a Muslim-Orthodox question is a bit like viewing American relations with the Caribbean and Central America as dominated by religious questions. Russia and the United States have strong geopolitical interests in what they consider their backyards; and in sorting out conflicts in these regions, religion, more often than not, has nothing to do with the case.

So far we have been discussing civilization largely as an explanation for lines of conflict. Now we should turn to civilization as an explanation for the motives of its "members." There is a very great danger that using the term "civilization" will lead us to underestimate the variety within that designation and the rapidity with which it can change over time. There is the even greater danger that units proposed as "civilizations" but still

far from being proved to be such will be treated as realities before they are shown to be such. Professor Huntington allows that civilizations have "variants," and that they are "dynamic; they rise and fall; they divide and merge." But his overall message is that civilizations are highly stable units, each internally united by a large number of characteristics: "Differences among civilizations are not only real; they are basic. Civilizations are differentiated from each other by history, language, culture, tradition and, most important, religion. The people of different civilizations have different views on relations between God and man, the individual and the group, the citizen and the state, parents and children, husband and wife, as well as differing views of the relative importance of rights and responsibilities, liberty and authority, equality and hierarchy. These differences are products of centuries. They will not soon disappear."[6]

The degree to which each civilization is closely tied to its assumed primary carriers is brought home by a paragraph in Professor Huntington's reply to his critics in a subsequent issue of *Foreign Affairs*. He notes that "the Census Bureau estimates that by 2050 the American population will be 23 percent Hispanic, 16 percent Black and 10 percent Asian-American." In the past the United States has successfully absorbed immigrants because they have "adapted to the prevailing European culture and enthusiastically embraced the American Creed of liberty, equality, individualism, democracy. Will this pattern continue to prevail as 50 percent of the population becomes Hispanic or nonwhite?" There is, he feels, a real possibility that this Hispanic and nonwhite population may not adapt to European culture and the American Creed, which would lead to "the de-Westernization of the United States" because it will have become "truly multicultural and pervaded with an internal clash of civilizations," and therefore unable to survive as a liberal democracy. In this case, "the United States as we have known it will cease to exist and will follow the other ideologically defined superpower onto the ash heap of history."[7] Why the 16 percent black Americans of 2050, overwhelmingly descended from black Americans who arrived here long before the Slavic, Italian

and other post-Civil War white immigrant groups, are considered not only not successfully absorbed but a potential source of "de-Westernization" of the United States remains to be explained in Huntington's forthcoming book.

Let us, however, examine one of the global traits that Professor Huntington ascribes to Islamic civilization. When Professor Huntington tells us that, "western ideas of ... free markets ... often have little resonance in Islamic (culture)," the "often" preserves him from a totalizing description; but what are we left with? Anyone who has read pre-modern Islamic law knows how frequently the saying of the Prophet Muḥammad, "God sets prices," is quoted, and how deeply suspicious this legal tradition is of price-setting. The overwhelming majority of the pre-Ottoman Islamic societies of the Middle East were free market economies. Is Professor Huntington thinking of the use of price fixing in certain periods of Ottoman history? As a student of the Islamic world, I would guess (although without great conviction) that most Muslims in most places and in most periods were free marketeers. But I do know that in the 1950s and 1960s in many Muslim countries socialist leaders such as Sukarno and Nasser insisted that Islam was inherently socialist (another totalizing assumption) and created laws accordingly. In fact, Nasser had Shaykh Makhluf, the highest religious authority in Egypt, dismissed when Makhluf rejected Nasser's contention that Islam was essentially socialistic. Therefore I know that Muslims can oppose a free market and know that they often have enthusiastically endorsed free markets. Although perfect market economies probably only exist in the minds of Chicago economists, at present among Islamic Middle Eastern countries alone relatively free markets exist in Morocco, Tunisia, Turkey, Kuwait, and most of the other Arab Gulf states. Can anyone say empirically that the idea of the free (or, for that matter, the controlled) market has "little resonance" in "Islamic civilization"? And, given the vast geographical spread and long historical varieties of the experience of Muslim peoples, is the question in any way useful, or even meaningful?

Behind this assumption of the very close ties between ideas and their assumed primary carriers are several other assumptions

hard to accept. One is that people are not merely influenced, sometimes shallowly, sometimes very deeply, by their cultures, but are intellectually subjugated to them. Another is that ideas live most authentically in their place of origin. Thus Professor Huntington tells us that "the very notion that there could be a 'universal civilization' is a Western idea," and, we are to understand therefore, difficult to export; it is "at odds with the particularism of most Asian societies and their emphasis on what distinguishes one people from another."[8] Even historically this claim may be questionable, as Christianity and Islam—both, incidently, Near Eastern in origin—are proselytizing monotheisms with ambitions to convert the entire world. But even granting that (on some definition of civilization) "universal civilization" may well be a "Western idea," what does this tell us? Does it tell us that "particularisms of most Asian societies and their emphasis on what distinguishes one people from another" have an iron grip on the minds of Asians, and that such Asians cannot, except in some remote future, make such alien concepts as "universal civilization" their own?

To many historians, claims that cultures are largely impervious and that "imported" ideas flourish less fully and authentically outside their places of origin seem strange indeed. Does the idea of casting ballots in elections flourish more authentically in its country of origin, Greece, than in Great Britain? The idea of courtly love certainly existed in early Arabic literature, and probably passed from there to the West; is Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* therefore less authentically English and European? Pseudo-scientific theories of race and a rigorous idea of "the color bar" are also a European invention; have they proved impossible to export?

Professor Huntington tells us that "modern democratic government originated in the West. When it has developed in non-Western societies it has usually been the product of Western colonialism or imposition." For anyone who sees a culture or "civilization" as a set of handmade Russian nesting dolls, each of which is almost certain never to fit into any other set, this view of culture, which regards "cultural grafts" as suspect *a priori*, will be convincing. But, of course, culture is not made of

nesting dolls or precisely shaped puzzle pieces; and large elements of Western culture introduced by colonialism, imposition, or mere imitation have developed deep and authentic roots in non-Western societies, to a degree that these societies often no longer sense these elements to be alien. Nothing in the premodern Islamic tradition drives modern Muslims to give the vote to women, and many Muslim conservatives opposed the enfranchisement of women. But in countries such as Turkey, Egypt, and Iran the overwhelming majority of Islamists—advocates of the reintroduction of some measure of Islamic law—would now never raise a whisper against votes for women, who form an important part of their constituents. Even Ayatollah Khomeini, though he had been opposed to the Iranian law of 1962 that enfranchised women, never suggested that Iran's new constitution, over which he could have exercised great power, should deny women the vote. The direct electoral participation of women is an irreversible fact in the life of many Islamic countries, regardless of whether or not it is an "imposition" and/or a "product of Western colonialism." The same can be said for written constitutions and national law codes.

The history of the West itself offers many striking illustrations of the sometimes gradual, sometimes rapid circulation of ideas from one area of the West to another, the virtual "colonization" of one part of the West by another, in a way that the nesting doll or rigid puzzle piece theory of culture would consider highly unlikely. And it also offers many examples of earlier Huntingtonians. It was once commonly said, for example, that democracy could only live fully and authentically in Protestant countries. The supposedly anti-liberal nature of Catholicism was a significant element in the struggle between Protestants and Catholics in nineteenth-century Germany called the *Kulturkampf*. The struggle took its name from the words of Rudolf Virchow, who in 1873 declared in the Prussian diet: "The contest has taken on the character of a great cultural struggle," all of which should sound enchantingly familiar to the new theorists of "the West against the rest." It was "self-evident" to many Protestants that Catholics were

obedient to the Pope and could not be true democratic participants in a German state; anti-Catholic sentiment was so strong that Prussia enacted a law to expel all Jesuits. Many Americans will remember the joke that the Catholic politician Alfred E. Smith, on losing his bid for the presidency in 1928, telegraphed the Pope to "unpack immediately." In America this distrust of Catholicism seems only to have died with the election of John F. Kennedy as President in 1960. In 1944, the most distinguished American Protestant theologian of his time, Reinhold Niebuhr, lamented the chasm "between the presuppositions of a free society and the inflexible authoritarianism of the Catholic religion."[9] To distrust the ability of sincere Catholics to be true democrats seems as quaint and fanciful to us at the end of the twentieth century as will seem, in a generation, our present distrust of the ability of sincere Muslims to be true democrats.

This tendency to assume that a group has uniformities of attitude that originate in its religious identity, and that are changed only with the greatest difficulty, has an earlier and dark chapter in Western Christian assessments of the Jews. In 1782 David Michaelis, a German professor of Oriental languages at the University of Göttingen and reputed to be a Christian expert on the Jews, wrote: "Does the Law of Moses make citizenship, and the full integration of the Jew into other peoples, difficult or impossible? I think it does"! Soon, this line of thought reached its full development as a theory of culture and citizenship, as when Bruno Bauer, a German Protestant theologian, wrote in 1843: "Human rights are the result of education, and they can be possessed only by those who acquire and deserve them. Can the Jew really possess them as long as he lives as a Jew in perpetual segregation from others, as long as he therefore must declare that the others are not really his fellowmen? As long as he is a Jew, his Jewishness must be stronger in him than his humanity, and keep him apart from non-Jews. He declares by his segregation that this, his Jewishness, is his true, highest nature, which has to have precedence over his humanity."[10] It should be noted that Bauer's sense of alienation from Jews was purely cultural and not racial; hence Bauer's important influence on

Karl Marx, who, although of Jewish origin, agreed that Jews should strip themselves of all "Jewishness" in order to join the body politic.

One last general observation would seem to weaken the strength of the Huntington thesis: its neglect of the distinction between peoples and governments. At the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna the majority of Chinese organizations not controlled by the Chinese government supported the Dalai Lama's right to speak, which the Chinese government unyieldingly opposed. The Dalai Lama rejected the position of China and some other Asian and African countries that human rights in less-developed countries need not be as liberal as elsewhere. "I do not share this view," he said, "and I am convinced that the majority of Asian people do not support this view either."[11] Are we really supposed to believe that the Chinese Communist government is more truly Buddhist and/or Confucian than the Chinese people and/or the Dalai Lama? The United States Congress has agreed to join the over one hundred nations that have ratified the 1948 convention on genocide only with reservations that nullify its commitments. Is this a sign that the American people are less truly attuned to the values of Western civilization than most other nations in the world, or that our legislative process often ties us in knots?

The sad but shocking truth is that readers less sophisticated than Professor Huntington will use his thesis to feed fantasies already too prevalent about a massive coordinated Islamic movement that sees as its primary objective the humiliation of the West. Of course, in a community of a billion souls, the Muslim world contains its analogues to our home-grown organizations of bigots such as the anti-Semitic Christian Patriot's Defense League in the United States or the die-hard fanatics in Northern Ireland. But Muslims—marvelous to say—are human beings, subject to all the pulls of economic need, local community, and all the other interests that influence humans everywhere; and only lavish, ignorant and sensationalizing uses of words like "fundamentalism" have blinded us to their humanity and diversity.

There is a group of Muslims, in my opinion very distinctly a minority, who are properly called Islamists, who call for some degree of reimposition of Islamic law, and who tend to view the West as a more or less unified and universal "alien civilization" to be treated in the spirit of the "clash of civilizations" thesis—with accommodation if possible, but with "confrontation" if necessary. (I do not speak here of the very small if noisy minority of militant extremist Muslims, who should not be allowed to set anyone's agenda for anything.) I strongly believe this group will remain a distinct minority, because it disregards the large historical variation in the Islamic tradition (even in the area of law), because its followers have large areas of internal disagreement, and because it has no real answers to the problems of economic and social justice that beleaguer the majority of Muslims.

In addition to the examples from the Caucasus, Balkans and Central Asia cited above, certain recent events have shown us the very considerable diversity of opinion on foreign policy even among this minority of Muslims who are "Islamists." This diversity was dramatically illustrated by the variety of Islamist reactions to the Gulf Crisis of 1990-91. In Egypt the Muslim Brothers were for some time unable to agree on the crisis, since Saudi Arabians had long supported them, but many members found the sight of non-Muslims sorting out a quarrel between Muslim nations unacceptable. Tunisian Islamists were similarly divided. Jordanian Islamists followed King Hussein in taking a pro-Iraqi stance. The principal Turkish Islamist party was at first favorable to Saddam, but then its leaders, after a September meeting with King Fahd of Saudi Arabia, became either neutral or somewhat critical of Saddam.[12] Professor Huntington writes, however, that "ignoring the rivalry between Iran and Iraq, the chief Iranian religious leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, called for a holy war against the West."[13] In fact, Iranian actions, such as the seizure of the Iraqi aircraft that fled the fighting to land in Iranian airports, are a far better gauge of how mindful the Iranian leadership was of its eight-year war with Iraq. It is mistaken information indeed that has persuaded Samuel Huntington to write, "Islamic fundamentalist movements

universally supported Iraq rather than the Western-backed governments of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia."

Many parallel cases, in which actual policy was determined by particularistic interests over pan-Islamic interests, will suggest themselves to anyone who follows the politics of nations in which Muslims are significantly represented. For example, Khomeini, for all his fierce rhetoric about Palestine, was far more concerned with Iraq. Ali-Akbar Mohtashemi, the Iranian ambassador to Syria in the early eighties and later the hard-line Minister of the Interior, in a recent interview in *Jahan-e Islam* claimed that in 1982 Khomeini personally stopped the Revolutionary Guard of Iran from going to Lebanon to fight Israel; "the Imam explained that it was not appropriate for Iran to confront Israel from a long distance without any common border, and to do a job that the Arabs themselves should do."[14]

A major problem in discussing the validity and/or importance of a thesis such as that proposed by Samuel Huntington is the weighing of evidence. Presumably, insofar as his examples of intercivilizational conflict prove to be incorrect—as for instance in the case of Chad—the evidence for his theory becomes thinner and the theory less sustainable. And, if ideas about civilization-wide traits, such as the presumed lack of "resonance" in Islamic civilization to Western ideas, turn out to be neither historically true nor true at present, the evidence for the Huntington thesis would seem to have less weight. At this point, however, a problem arises for everyone who seeks to evaluate the Huntington thesis. Non-Western civilizations are not likely to change soon, we are told, because they have been the way they are for a long time. At the same time, much of the evidence for the nature of their long-held traits is shown in their recent behavior. Moreover, the Huntington essay is in significant part a prophesy about the future.

About the evidence that the future will provide we can (or, at least, should) agree to be silent. But if "civilizations" have proved fairly rapidly adaptive to *some* imported institutions, as this essay argues many Islamic societies (including their minorities of Islamists) have proven to be (in, for example, accepting the enfranchisement of women), then which long-term

traits are predictive of future behavior? There is a good argument to be made that such traits can be identified in local cultures (much smaller units than the proposed "civilizations"). We must hope that in his book Samuel Huntington will provide us with a theory that will explain why there is this significant variation in local adaptability to change within each civilization. Such an explanation would advance social theory immeasurably.

If, however, only *very* recent events count as evidence for such a theory, then how are we to weigh examples against counterexamples? Is the supposedly intercivilizational conflict between the Ossetes and the Ingush more or less important than the intracivilizational conflict between the Ossetes and the Georgians (and so on and so forth)? Of course, the world system was partly frozen in place by the Cold War, and now is in motion again with an attendant number of small wars. But is this motion a new trend, or is it back to history all over again? The nineteenth century saw the expansion of some empires on the basis of (conflictingly described) civilizational missions, as well as the contraction of others, such as the Ottomans, who energetically (but, in the end, futilely) evoked first a pan-Islamic, then a pan-Turkic civilizational claim. First, the case has to be made that long-existing non-civilizational causes, such as the mutual distrust of Caucasian peoples, do not satisfactorily account for the conflicts brought forward as civilizational conflicts. Second, the truly abysmal record of civilization-wide movements, from pan-Slavism and pan-Islam in the nineteenth century to the international Islamic organizations of today, to deliver effective backing for political action will have to be accounted for.

Pan-Islamic movements have often loomed unaccountably large in the mind of the West. In 1916 a supposed expert on the Middle East, the American Samuel M. Zwemer, wrote in *Muḥammad or Christ*: "The coming struggle will not be solely religious, but an educational, industrial, social, and political upheaval in which religion plays a chief part ... . It is a struggle between two civilizations; between the ideals of the Moslem world and those of Christendom."[15] In the First World War the opposing sides in Europe nurtured hopes that they could arouse

Islamic holy wars led by the (pro-German) Ottomans or the (pro-British) Hashemites. In the event these hopes aroused the Western European imagination far more than they aroused the Middle Eastern Islamic imagination. Huntington, who has been a pioneer in developing mathematical expression of political trends, will have to give us some basis on which to weigh the comparative importance of examples and to demonstrate that the examples he cites do, in fact, show a strong new trend, and are not a miscellany that could be matched in the 1890s or 1910s.

One argument implicit in Huntington's proposal—namely, that his "civilizational approach" should be accepted because it has no plausible competitors that explain contemporary international politics—seems to me to be a complete non-starter. In his reply to his critics Huntington tells us: "When people think seriously, they think abstractly; they conjure up simplified pictures of reality called concepts, theories, models and paradigms. Without such intellectual constructs, there is, William James said, only 'a bloomin' buzzin' confusion.' "[16] William James uses this phrase in only two places I know of, and in neither does he use it in the same sense as Huntington.[17] James seems to be arguing for the need for such basic concepts as "sea" or "grass" in order for us, in his terminology, to "disassociate" discrete elements from the continuum of perception—the blooming, buzzing reality he assumes that babies feel. He goes on to say that our desire to harmonize these concepts leads to "explanatory systems." If people fail to find an explanatory system, however, it does not mean that they have regressed to seeing the world as a "blooming, buzzing confusion." When Locke saw states living in a world of unregulated competition and wrote that, "[T]he whole community is one body in the state of nature in respect to all other states," he had not with that remark entered his second infancy.[18]

Even if we were to assume that our perception of international relations would be a "blooming, buzzing confusion" without an "explanatory system," however, we need not follow Huntington's claim that his theory is better than others because "intellectual and scientific advance, as Thomas

Kuhn showed ..., consists of the displacement of one paradigm, which has become increasingly incapable of explaining new or newly discovered facts, by a new paradigm that accounts for those facts in a more satisfactory fashion." Margaret Masterman, in an essay which Kuhn has largely endorsed, has shown that Kuhn uses "paradigm" in a number of different ways, but only rarely as a hypothesis, pure and simple, although this understanding of paradigm seems to be the only one that has entered popular usage (which is one of several reasons that Professor Kuhn no longer uses the term himself). What Kuhn is talking about, as he repeatedly says, is "normal science," so well accepted that experimenters who find results that contradict the paradigms of normal science blame themselves rather than "normal science."[19] For Kuhn, a paradigm is never an individual possession, but is constitutive of a group. No one doubts Huntington's enormous, perhaps unmatched, distinction among political scientists. But would even he, in the unlikely event that his modesty should fail him, claim that he has created a "normal" political science of international relations, in the face of which other political scientists discredit contrary examples?

A large number of international-relations specialists continue to argue vigorously that "Realism," the school of international relations that claims that states act largely to protect their interests and are the predominant players in world politics, explains more events than any other. Against this theory Huntington has fielded some interesting possible counterexamples. Kuhn believes most of the social sciences to be in the pre-paradigm stage, in which examples and counterexamples are adduced and competing theories easily coexist. He writes: "In the physical sciences disagreement about fundamentals is, like the search for basic innovations, reserved for periods of chaos. It is, however, by no means equally clear that a consensus of anything like similar strength and scope ordinarily characterizes the social sciences." It is not clear that by Kuhn's standards either history or international relations will ever emerge from the pre-paradigm phase, but he offers historians like myself and other social scientists the wise advice: "As in individual development, so in the scientific group, maturity comes most surely to those who know how to wait."[20]

Yet does the "clash of civilizations" hypothesis actually offer us a "theory," in William James's sense of an "explanatory system"? It seems to me far more a description (and prescription) than an explanatory system. It offers a long list of things that the West is—the bearer of individualism, liberalism, democracy, free markets and the like—but, by and large, just tells us that the non-Western, in the great American language of the mutiple-choice test, is "none of the above." There are a few tantalizing hints, as when Huntington says that the Western notion of universal civilization is "at odds with the particularism of most Asian societies and their emphasis on what distinguishes one people from another." But even if we were to grant that particularism is non-existent in the West or far weaker than in some unit transcivilizationally or geographically defined as "Asian," we are left with very little in the way of explanation as to why others act differently from the West, insofar as they do act differently. Huntington tells us that "civilizations are differentiated from each other by history, language, culture, tradition and, most important, religion." Is it, then, religion as a set of beliefs that determines social, economic, and political attitudes, and if so, are these beliefs really stable, determining the behavior of those who hold them, and clearly different from the list of beliefs Huntington ascribes to the West?

As an Islamicist, I believe that the result of our examination of the assumption about free markets given above could be multiplied many fold. Islam exists as a normative set of beliefs chiefly at the level of Islamic law, which, as I have said, is very largely in favor of free markets. But I would not *a priori* expect this normative legal system actually to influence social and governmental behavior. If I did, I would be led into a set of totally mistaken assumptions about the behavior of Muslim societies in various times and places, past and present. As an Islamicist, it seems to me that to assume a set of normative beliefs over a vast area, such as a Huntingtonian civilization, is an extraordinarily difficult task even for the Islamic world which supposedly had a normative system of law. This distinct variety

among the cultures of Muslims was even true before the mid-nineteenth century, up to which time there was some limited uniformity in the training of legal experts in much of the Islamic world, a small but important "class" of bearers of this normative law. And, as a social historian, it seems to me an extraordinary assumption that, even if we were to identify a large and clear set of normative beliefs for one of these civilizations, that these beliefs should easily determine the behavior of those who formally ascribe to them.[21] As someone born into an American Christian milieu and a product of twelve happy years of Quaker education, in order for me to believe that Christians when abused are supposed to turn the other cheek, I must forget the example of almost all the Christians I have ever met.

If we set aside the problem of what beliefs shape a civilization and how they do so, we are still left with Huntington's definition of a civilization as the largest "identity"; the civilization is "the broadest level of identification with which he [i.e., one of its members] intensely identifies." If we disregard the question of intensity, this statement gives us a functional definition of civilization, and one that probably has more significance for Muslims than for most other groups identified by Huntington. But let us examine what this means for a specific people who are overwhelmingly Muslim: the Iranians. Why is one of the best known and most frequently quoted lines of Persian verse, "The sons of Adam are limbs of each other"? Is it possible that Iranians identify not only with Muslims but also, like the rest of us, with the human race? Over sixteen years have passed since the "Islamic revolution" in Iran; if you asked Iranians individually, "Who are you?" I would guess that the first answer would be, "an Iranian," their identity, therefore, of greatest intensity. I would also guess that the great majority of Iranians would agree that, after sixteen years of searching for an Islamic identity, the contents of such an identity (including the content of an Islamic foreign policy) is far less clear to them now than it has ever been.

Columbus died thinking that he had discovered the easternmost parts of Asia; his discovery is no less considerable for his mistake. Huntington has discussed the revival of identity

politics, even if this identity is usually (though not always) felt "intensely" in units far smaller than his "civilizations." The social and economic revolutions of recent history have swept aside traditional elites in many parts of the world, and the revolution in communications and education has persuaded peoples all over the globe to assert themselves directly in a wider political world, and not through the intermediacy of elites. At first, many of these new political actors will form groups based on a variety of identities. In some cases such an identity will take its name from a religious group, as in Bosnia, where membership in the category "Muslim" has nothing to do with actual religious belief. (In Bosnia, many so-called Muslims are agnostics or atheists.) In other places, as in the Caucasus, identity seems overwhelmingly to correspond to language, so that a group such as the Ossetes, in majority Christian and in minority Muslim, nevertheless feel a strong ethnic identity and have, by and large, worked in concert. Overlapping identities are a feature of all societies and asking questions appropriate to these identities will yield different answers. Mexico, considered as a state that belongs to NAFTA, to Latin America, to the successor states of the Aztecs, to the Catholic world, and so on and so forth, will yield different explanations for its conduct in its international relations as each of those identities is considered; is it really evident that any of these identities has clear primacy for all major questions? Might not NAFTA, in some respects a weak identity, still be the central identity for a discussion of economic foreign policy?

Some identities are, indeed, transnational, and hence, to use Huntington's felicitous phrase, transnational "resonances" exist. They have some (though, more often than not, secondary) importance in explaining political behavior. Orthodox Russia feels a certain sympathy for Orthodox Serbia, Catholic Europe for Catholic Croatia, and the Muslim world for Muslim Bosnia, although invoking these three civilizational ties would lead us only a very limited way toward understanding outside reaction to the tragedy that has unfolded in the former Yugoslavia. Yet in Bosnia, where the United States proved the decisive outside actor, as in Northern Ireland and so many other places, these

animosities based on identity seem only to flourish when they are cultivated by desperate leaders. Many observers believe that, without Milosevic's use of "Serbian" identity, Yugoslavia might well not have unraveled. Not the least contribution of Professor Huntington is that he has increased our ability to see that appeals by leaders to the defense of "cultural" values may be increasingly used by politicians (as seems to be the case in the United States). Politicians, like writers of panegyrics, tend to be maximizers, who use every claim possible to achieve some minimal credibility. Perhaps we are reentering a period in which claims that are in some loose sense "cultural" have become more frequent. Necessarily, such a contention is hard to quantify, but if demonstrated, it offers an important insight into contemporary politics.

It would, however, be a very great mistake to buy into the cultural claims of these desperate leaders and to construct policy on their claims. As for the policy recommendation that we should seek "to exploit differences and conflicts among Confucian and Islamic states," we hope that Professor Huntington is only thinking of the pan-Asiatic games. Some of us, perhaps including Professor Huntington, actually believe that the United States has higher interests than seeking the exploitation of harmful conflicts. If we were to discover a secret memorandum circulated among the Chinese leadership that claimed a policy interest in exploiting "differences and conflicts" between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland, or between the races in the United States, we would want further explanation as to what was intended. Professor Huntington, whose intentions are surely benign, should not be surprised that this aspect of his recommendations for policy has aroused great suspicion in the parts of the world he characterizes as "Confucian" and "Islamic."

By early August 1990 Saddam Hussein's initial rationale for the invasion of Kuwait—that he had come at the invitation of a "Free Kuwaiti Interim Government"—had collapsed because no Kuwaiti collaborators could be found. On 10 August Saddam decided to play the "civilizational card," as Huntingtonian theory would have predicted, and called for an Islamic "holy war"

against "aggressive invaders" and their "collaborators." He based his call in part on the linkage he claimed to have established between his withdrawal from Kuwait and Israeli withdrawal from the Occupied Territories. Saddam had a long record as a secularist who advocated the complete divorce of religion from politics, and he was nobody's model of a pious Muslim. Yet he found a certain, though decidedly limited (and ultimately ineffectual), response among Muslims to his call for a "holy war." It has taken one of our most perceptive political scientists to show us that, for some political leaders at the end of the twentieth century, civilizationalism, and not nationalism, has become the last refuge of scoundrels.

It is, perhaps, appropriate in our conclusion to return to our two prophet-philosophers of history. Spengler believed that each culture has its unique "soul" and, hence, sought to define that soul; he also believed decline to be the result of the betrayal of that soul. (Strangely, in the German context he saw parliamentary democracy as the great betrayal.) Toynbee, like Spengler, was driven to his civilizational analysis by the shock of the First World War. But, unlike Spengler, who was a deep pessimist, Toynbee was optimistic about the coming of a successor civilization to the West. Toynbee, who struggled mightily—but not always successfully—to avoid ethnocentrism, believed that alien elements in the West such as "Negro rhythms" were evidence of its decline. (The spirit of jazz might have done a lot for Toynbee's impressive—but ultimately exhausting—stately prose style.) Since Toynbee saw many civilizations as emanating from religious and/or cultural bases, he had to classify the more ancient minority religions still living as "fossilized relics." These fossils of earlier civilizations included "the Monophysite Christians of Armenia, Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Abyssinia and the Nestorian Christians of Kurdistan and Malabar, as well as the Jews and Parsees," to which he subsequently added "the Lamaistic Mahayana Buddhists of Ceylon, Burma, and Siam, as well as the Jains in India."[22] This somewhat strange list (are Armenians and Jews really so unlike the peoples surrounding them as to be described as "fossilized relics"?) shows that even an extremely

learned would-be empiricist such as Toynbee could be led astray by a mania for order. Such manias, alas, have all too often led theorists like Toynbee to strain the evidence in order to discover lists of traits that "essentially" characterize the units they call "civilizations." (In this respect Toynbee came in the end to resemble Spengler, as a discoverer of the "souls" of civilizations, an approach which he claimed to dislike.)

Samuel Huntington has raised the challenge for us to define in a really empirical fashion large transnational cultural entities, to explain to what degree their systems of belief affect their behavior, and to explain why various traits of these civilizations migrate, sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly, and sometimes not at all, between these entities. Only when this challenge has been met can there be any meaningful discussion on an academic level about the nature of the "West" and its relation with "the rest." But even if (as I very much doubt) it is empirically established that the "West" is a well-defined area that is the sole bearer of many beliefs, beliefs which will not for some time be adopted by other "civilizations," do we want to construct a policy of pessimism on this finding? If we were to discover growing racism in America, we would feel a sense of urgency to strive against it. Similarly, if there really is growing alienation between civilizations, we should not limit ourselves to an austere policy that only in passing mentions accommodation when possible to "alien" civilizations. My reading of the American tradition is that we should seek to create such possibilities even if at first they seem impossible. We are too great a people to do anything less.

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[1] Samuel P. Huntington. "The Clash of Civilizations?" in *Foreign Affairs* 72,3 (Summer 1993). The author would like to thank several Harvard colleagues, Professors Edward Keenan, Roger Owen, Roderick MacFarquhar and Thomas Scanlon, for their extremely useful comment on this paper. I would also like to thank Professor Thomas S. Kuhn of MIT. All opinions expressed here are, of course, entirely my own. Although I am a historian of the medieval Middle East, my interest in the comparative study of Islamic societies dates back to a conversation with Vartan Gregorian in Afghanistan in 1961, to whom I dedicate this paper.

[2] John Kenyon, *The History Men* (London, 1983), p. 282.

[3] René Lemarchand, "Chad," in the *Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World* (New York, 1995),1:276.

[4] See the reports of Raymond Bonner in the *New York Times*, 30 April 1995, p. 4, and 2 April 1995, p. 10.

[5] See the excellent article by Mohiaddin Mesbahi, "Russian Foreign Policy Security in Central Asia and the Caucasus," in *Central Asian Survey*, 12,2 (1993), p.181-215.

[6] Huntington, "Clash of Civilizations," pp. 24-5.

[7] Samuel P. Huntington, "If Not Civilizations, What?" in *Foreign Affairs* 72, 5 (Nov-Dec. 1993), 190.

[8] Huntington, "Clash of Civilizations," p. 41.

[9] Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness: A Vindication of Democracy and a Critique of Its Traditional Defense* (New York,1944), p.319. I owe this quote to John T. McGreevy's forthcoming paper, "Thinking On One's Own."

[10] *The Jew in the Modern World: A Documentary History*, eds. Paul R. Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz (New York, 1980), pp. 37 (Michaelis) and 263 (Bauer). These remarks are not meant to suggest that Professor Huntington's name can by any stretch of the imagination be associated with anti-Semitism or racism of any kind.

[11] Associated Press Report by Alexander G. Higgins, Vienna, Austria, 15 June 1993.

[12] See François Burgat, "Islamists and the Gulf Crisis," in *The Arab World Today*, ed. Dan Tschirgi (Boulder, 1994), pp. 205-11, and R.P. Mottahdeh, "The Islamic Movement: The Case for Democratic Inclusion," in *Contention* 4:3 (Spring 1995), pp. 107-27.

[13] Huntington, "Clash of Civilizations," p. 35.

[14] Quoted by William Scott Harrop, "Iran's Revolutionary Paradox," in *Mind and Human Interaction* 6,1 (Feb. 1995), p. 26.

[15] (London, 1916), pp. 121 and 124. I am grateful to the ever-learned Yvonne Haddad for calling these quotations to my attention.

[16] Huntington "If Not Civilizations, What?" p. 186.

[17] William James, *Principles of Psychology*, I (Cambridge, Mass., 1981), p. 461 and *Some Problems in Philosophy* (Cambridge, Mass., 1979), p. 32.

[18] John Locke, *The Second Treatise of Government*, chapter 12, paragraph 145. I had wrongly ascribed this quotation to Hobbes and thank my extremely kind friend, Professor Charles Miller, for correcting that assumption.

[19] Margaret Masterman, "The Nature of a Paradigm," pp. 59-89, and Thomas S. Kuhn, "Reflections on My Critics," pp.231-78, in *Growth of Knowledge* (Cambridge, Mass.,1970).

[20] Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Essential Tension* (Chicago, 1977), pp. 221-222.

[21] One of the greatest anthropologists of our time, in comparing Morocco and Indonesia, discussed the extraordinary difficulty in identifying features of a society as Islamic; see Clifford Geertz, *Islam Observed* (New Haven, 1968).

[22] A.J. Toynbee, *A Study of History* (Oxford, 1934),1:35.