

Review

Reviewed Work(s): *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* by Samuel P. Huntington

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causes of this pattern of behavior as well as the exploration of what a new security regime will entail would have provided those interested in international relations and the Middle East a better piece of scholarship, as well as a greater contribution to the existing literature on the subject.

Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. New York: Simon and Shuster, 1996. 367 pp., Hardcover \$26.00.

Reviewed by **Zerougui Abdel Kader**

In a 1993 article in *Foreign Affairs*, Samuel Huntington, a professor of political science at Harvard University, predicted that future wars will be fought along civilizational rather than economic, political, or ideological lines. In his latest book, *The Clash of Civilizations*, Huntington expands and defends his thesis. "World politics," he writes: "is being reconfigured along cultural and civilizational lines. In this world the most pervasive, important and dangerous conflicts will not be between social classes, rich and poor, or other economically defined groups, but between peoples belonging to different cultural entities."

Huntington identifies seven such cultural entities: "Western, Confucian, Japanese, Islamic, Hindu, Slavic-orthodox, Latin-American, and possibly African civilizations." Huntington claims that as these groups become more conscious of what distinguishes them from others, they become more loyal to their individual civilizations, and as a result, the possibilities of conflicts have increased. "People," he explains, "use politics not just to advance their interests but also to define their identity." As a consequence, Huntington says, the Western world should be ready to contain any possible threats from the non-Western world. Although Huntington believes that Confucian culture represents a major challenge to the West, he joins Francis Fukuyama and Bernard Lewis in demonizing Islam as the main threat to Western civilization. According to Huntington, the differences between Western and Islamic civilizations are so great that the possibility of reconciliation between them is very unlikely. He maintains that Islamic countries have "bloody borders." He advocates fueling conflicts within and among Muslim countries, and between the Muslim and non-Muslim countries. He also advocates encouraging divisions, and using international organizations to weaken the Muslim and especially Arab countries—Huntington often conflates the two even though Arabic speaking people

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represent at best 17% of the world's Muslim population. Huntington's book shares the flaws of Fukuyama's *The End of History* and Lewis's "The Roots of Muslim Rage."

It is certainly the case that there are differences among the civilizational blocks Huntington identifies, but these blocs are not as homogenous and self-contained as Huntington would have us believe. Neither in Western, nor in Islamic civilizations is there a homogeneous ethos. There is, instead, a plurality of methods of different forms and origins (history, customs, environment, wealth, class, lifestyles), not only across countries belonging to the same civilizational bloc but within countries as well. How to articulate the different and often contradictory elements that are part of every civilization and how to determine what is essential and what is peripheral depends on the kind of values to which a person subscribes. What Huntington takes to be essential to Western civilization may be marginal according to other readings of history. For example, few people would downplay the importance of Catholicism and Protestantism in the constitution of Western civilization as Huntington does. In order to survive, all societies develop traits that are the function of human needs and interests, e.g., a legal system, and because they interact, influence and borrow from each other, they form a mesh of similarities and differences. If Christianity constitutes a major building block of Western civilization, then, because Islam is a continuation of Judaism and Christianity, it is closer to the West than Huntington is willing to admit. In terms of customs and temperament, Corsicans, Sicilians, and other groups in Southern Europe are closer to North Africans than they are to Scandinavians and Germans. In addition, Arab and Islamic states have adopted, to different degrees, laws and forms of governments from their colonizers. For example, North African counties have inherited a large body of laws from France. Even in family law and inheritance where Islamic laws are traditionally dominant, many changes have been introduced to accommodate the process of modernization and democratization. This does not mean that the idea of democracy is totally alien to these countries as Huntington claims; what they have adopted from the West may be no more than a modern expression of some fundamental tenets of Islam such *ijma*, or consensus, and the local practice of town meetings.

Huntington's simplistic view of the dynamic of civilizations is most visible in the way he deals with the relationship between church and state in the West and in Islam. Huntington argues that Muslim countries have not evolved because they have espoused fatalism, authoritarianism, and have not separated the temporal from the celestial. Western civilization, he believes, evolved because of the separation between church and state, the rule of law, secularization of the political life, and the development of civil society. Huntington assumes erroneously that the relation between church and state in the West is settled once and for all. Nothing is farther from the truth. The importance of religion in public policy, whether religion ought to be tolerated in public schools, whether abortion ought to be legal, or whether religious symbols ought to be permitted in the work place, are all hot issues in the United States. The kind of truce that exists between the state and religion in the U.S. may be no more than a *modus-vivendi*. In addition,

the relationship between church and state varies widely from country to country. In Ireland, Spain, and Italy the Church remains very powerful.

If the tension between religion and the state are intense and take violent forms in some Muslim countries it may be because of poverty, history, external interventions and the impact of colonialism and imperialism. The same kind of simplistic view underlies Huntington's view of relations between states. Huntington claims that in the future, nations will form alliances on the basis of similar "civilizational interests." This is simply contrary to fact. It is more often than not the culture of each country, its history, and its geopolitical interests rather than religion that dictate its foreign policy. Turkey, a Muslim country, has signed a military treaty with Israel, while the Islamic republic of Iran remains at odds with Iraq, another Muslim country. In its 1972 war of independence, Bangladesh sought Hindu India's military assistance against Muslim Pakistan. During the Gulf War, several Arab and Muslim states, out of regional interests, the sake of their own survival, and fear of secular Iraq—a fear that was fueled by Western countries to maintain their control over the oil rich states of the Gulf—allied themselves with the United States. While Saudi Arabia and Kuwait paid 90 percent of the war efforts, Morocco, Egypt, Syria, and Senegal provided ground troops to help the American assault. In fact, even the Islamist movements in the region were divided over whether to support Iraq or not.

Huntington's thesis is not only simplistic but also triumphalist. Like Francis Fukuyama, Huntington argues that history has reached its ultimate goal in the supremacy of Western civilization. He does, however, suggest that multiculturalism in the United States threatens Western civilization. He points out that "the Census Bureau estimates that by 2050 the American population will be 23 percent Hispanic, 16 percent Black and 10 percent Asian-American." He fears that this Hispanic, Asian, and Black population may not "enthusiastically" embrace "the American creed of liberty, individualism [and] democracy." He claims that there is a real possibility that the demographic trend of the United States will lead to the decline and the "dewesternization of the United States" because it will have become "truly multicultural and pervaded with an internal clash of civilizations." This may be true, but what threatens the stability of the United States may be less multiculturalism than class conflict. Huntington's work is thus unrealistic. He writes as if the only conflicts that tear American society apart are conflicts of cultures. He ignores that people are motivated by greed, fear, passion, and the like as much as by cultural allegiance. He seems oblivious to discrimination, class and power. Animosities between ethnic groups stem not only from cultural differences, but from unequal opportunities and unfair distribution of wealth. As more Americans are sinking into the cycle of poverty—50 million Americans live below a poverty line of \$8,122—dissidence becomes a very attractive method of expression. Furthermore, as the gap between social classes increases, and more groups are left out of economic and political power, violence, rebellion and dissidence increase. The Los Angeles riots of 1994, the growth of the militia movements, the development of home grown terrorism are all indicators that stability is as much an economic as a cultural problem.

Finally, Huntington claims that rationality, tolerance, democracy, the rule of law, and humanity are distinguishing characteristics of Western civilization. This is a good example of his ethnocentric bias and the sloppiness of his research. Does his bold statement mean that the rest of the world is irrational, intolerant, and inhuman? To start, the West is not always a haven of tolerance; the Inquisition, Auschwitz, slavery, the Gulf war, all testify to the contrary. The idea of tolerance, rule of law, and the free market, that Huntington says have "little resonance" in non-western civilizations are part of the Muslim doctrine, albeit in different forms. The Qur'an does not deplore free markets and does not advocate authoritarianism. As to the accusation of intolerance, Islam's favorable attitude toward Christians and Jews proves that it does not advocate the imposition of a homogeneous social and political order. Even though it affirms its own prominence, Islam grants Christians and Jews protected status within the Islamic community. They are required to pay a tax and are forbidden to proselytize. But both their religious practices and their laws are protected. Islam accepted that the Jews, for example, be subject to Jewish law even within Islamic society. Huntington does not distinguish between the ideals of societies and their actual practice.

If *The Clash of Civilizations* were a purely academic exercise, it would not bother this reviewer as its arguments are easy to refute. However, it is frightening that Huntington, a former member of the U.S. National Security Council member, has been praised by, among other influential people, Henry Kissinger and Zbigniew Brzezinski. If this is how people who influence U.S. foreign policy think, we are in trouble.