

The clash of radicals and moderates?

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In his well-known 1993 essay “The Clash of Civilizations?” Samuel P. Huntington sets forward a hypothesis that the fundamental source of conflict in the future will not be national, economic or ideological but cultural. Furthermore, Huntington predicts that the major conflicts in the future will not be within one particular civilization but on the borders of different civilizations, or as he puts it, “the fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future.” A few years later in 1996, Huntington provided further argumentation for this “civilizational paradigm” in his book *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*.

According to Huntington, there are seven or eight major civilizations today: Western, Orthodox, Islamic, Sinic, Japanese, Hindu, Latin American and African. For Huntington, a civilization is “the highest cultural grouping of people and the broadest level of cultural identity people have [...]. It is defined both by common objective elements, such as language, history, religion, customs, institutions, and by the subjective self-identification of people.” In other words, it is an expansion of Hegel’s notion of *Sittlichkeit* (i.e. “ethical order”) beyond the boundaries of national people, and so a way of conceptualising custom-based entities (*Sitte* = ‘custom’) at the regional level, without suggesting that there is any structure of political authority within or above such entities.

Huntington points out that there are several alternative paradigms that seek to describe the post Cold War global politics – “the end of history”, “Us and Them”, “the nation state”, “the chaos paradigm” etc. - yet none of them, in his view, describe world politics adequately. Huntington argues that “the clash of civilizations” paradigm is replacing, among others, “the Cold War” paradigm “as the central phenomenon of global politics”. It seems that Huntington ‘borrows’ Bernard Lewis’ notion of the “clash of civilization” (“The Roots of Muslim Rage”, 1990) and combines it with Carl Schmitt’s theory of “friend/foe” by arguing that the clash of civilizations will dominate global politics in the coming years. Huntington follows Schmitt’s fundamental distinction between ‘friend’ and ‘foe’ but he is defining the ‘foe’ according to civilizational rather than ideological or economic lines. For Schmitt the ‘foe’ is always posited, not presupposed, by the acts through which political communities are founded. Whereas for Huntington such distinction exists as given, defined by the essential or inner character of ‘civilizations’. In his subsequent essay “If

Not Civilizations, What? Paradigms of the Post-Cold War World” Huntington points out to his critics that there has been no meaningful and useful alternative paradigm offered by any of his critics, i.e. a “compelling alternative picture of the world”. Huntington’s ideas are shared and supported by many intellectuals, politicians, diplomats and journalists. Furthermore, his paradigm is often used and misused by radicals from different camps in order to further their religious, ethnic, political or “civilizational” goals.

As the title of this essay suggests, I disagree with Huntington’s central hypothesis and I shall, as many other critics have done, advocate an alternative hypothesis that might help us to grasp the underlying tendencies of global politics today. I shall argue that since the end of the Cold War, global politics has been dominated by clashes between radicals and moderates from different religions, nationalities, ethnic and political groups. In a sense I agree with many critics of Huntington like the British Prime Minister Tony Blair who have contended that the fight against terrorism is not a fight against Islam - and therefore there is no conflict of civilizations - but a fight against extremism and militant fundamentalism, i.e. ultimately a fight against radicals.

It is clear that notions such as ‘radicals’ and ‘moderates’ are relative, and depend on the political, religious, ethnic context and historical setting. There is no one universal criterion that can be applied to determine such notions. However, as a guiding principle, it is generally accepted that ‘radicals’ are those who advocate and use violence for achieving their religious, ethnic, political or “civilizational” goals. Thus, I do not identify radicals only as Islamic radicals but use it in a generic sense to identify radicals with different agendas, be it racial, national, ethnic, political, ideological, religious, or even “civilizational”. It follows that by ‘moderates’ one can understand those who use force only for self or collective defence; avoid using violence to achieve their racial, national, ethnic, politico-ideological, religious and “civilizational” goals; are tolerant towards other racial, national, ethnic, political, ideological, religious groups and civilizations.

Whilst accepting the possibility of different interpretations of historical events, let’s now consider some major conflicts since the end of the Cold War and see whether they have been indeed, as Huntington claims, clashes between civilizations.

If one examines the first Persian Gulf War in 1991, one can argue that it was not a clash of civilizations but a conflict between a radical totalitarian secular Muslim regime, i.e. Iraq led by Saddam Hussein, and a moderate Muslim regime, i.e. Kuwait. After its occupation, the latter received significant military and political support from an international coalition of both non-Muslim and Muslim nations (e.g. Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Syria, Morocco, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Qatar, etc). It seems that Huntington himself agrees with this interpretation for he admits in his essay that, “in the Gulf War one Arab state invaded another, then fought a coalition of Arab, Western and other states.” He admits that several Christian states sent a massive army to defend an Arab and Muslim state, i.e. Kuwait.

Thus, neither Hussein nor the Islamic radicals succeed in provoking a war between Muslim and Christian civilizations in the first Gulf War.

I believe that with some reservations one can even argue that, despite the desperate calls of Hussein and many radical Muslims around the world, the second Persian Gulf War in 2003 was not a war between civilizations. On the one hand, it was a war between Iraq and the U.S., the UK and a multinational coalition that included both Muslim (e.g. Azerbaijan, Albania) and non-Muslim nations. On the other hand it was also a conflict between Hussein's totalitarian regime and the other ethnic and religious groups within Iraq, i.e. the Kurds, the Shiite, etc.

One can also maintain that the war in Afghanistan in 2001 was not a clash of civilizations but a conflict between radical Muslims (the Taliban and al-Qaeda) and moderate Muslims (the Northern Alliance). Of course, the latter got significant military and political support from a multinational coalition that included among others many Muslim nations, e.g. Egypt, Jordan, Turkey, Uzbekistan and the United Arab Emirates.

As critics of Huntington have pointed out, the Yugoslav succession wars were not clashes of civilizations but rather conflicts between radicals and moderates across various civilizations. In the 1992-1995 Bosnia and Herzegovina conflict, the Muslims, i.e. Bosnians, despite an initial tragic delay, received significant military and political support from the U.S. and NATO. Huntington dismisses the latter as a "partial exception to the civilizational pattern" and claims that the U.S. help to Bosnian Muslims was a "non-civilization anomaly in the otherwise universal pattern of kin backing". Here one has to recall that in the Kosovo conflict in 1999, the Muslims, i.e. Kosovar Albanians also received significant military support from Christian and non-Christian countries, e.g. the U.S. and NATO.

Here one has to stress that NATO is not strictly speaking "the security organization of Western Civilization" as Huntington claims, but an intercivilizational defence and military alliance of Western, Orthodox and Muslim nations. I contend one cannot dismiss Greek, Turkish or Bulgarian membership in NATO as a mere 'anomaly' or 'exception'.

If we look at one of the worst post-Cold War conflicts, the 1994 Rwandan genocide, then one has to admit that it was not a clash of civilizations but a clash of radicals and moderates from different ethnic groups. The radicals, i.e. the extremist Hutu militias known as *Interahamwe*, killed nearly one million Tutsis and moderate Hutus in a few months. As we know, the international community, unfortunately, was not effective in its response to prevent this tragedy from happening.

If we now turn to the ongoing tragic conflict in Sudan's Darfur area, it is clear that this is not a conflict between civilizations but a conflict between radical Muslims (i.e. the *Janjaweed* militias) and moderate Muslims (black Africans). One can be quite certain that in this case the moderate Muslim and non-Muslim nations around the world will

provide help and support to those Muslim people in the Darfur area in order to prevent further atrocities and ethnic cleansing.

One must also take note of the fact that both the Persian Gulf Wars and the war in Afghanistan were not on the civilizational fault lines but in the centre of the Islamic civilization. Furthermore, the clashes within Algeria, Egypt or Saudi Arabia seem to occur mostly along the fault lines of radical and moderate Muslims rather than civilizations.

Thus having examined a few major global conflicts since the end of the Cold War, one has to conclude that despite the desperate efforts of radicals from all sides to provoke a clash of civilizations, they have so far not succeeded. Fortunately for the moderates, the conflicts in Iraq, Afghanistan, Bosnia, Kosovo, Rwanda, and Darfur demonstrate that Huntington's "kin country syndrome" is rather the wishful thinking of some radicals, than a reality.

There is also another problem with Huntington's analysis: how can two or more civilizations actually go to war? For example, how do you tell when two civilizations – as opposed to two nations – are actually at war? And how do you determine the real reasons for this war? Are they 'civilizational' or purely nationalistic or political-economic, e.g. regime change or oil? At best, such a paradigm is more an indicative metaphor than an analytical tool. The main use of this metaphor is to persuade someone that his or her real enemy is behind the façade presented by the enemy being attacked, e.g. the second Gulf War.

To conclude this brief examination, there seem to be too many 'anomalies' and 'exceptions' in Huntington's civilizational paradigm. As Thomas Kuhn pointed out in his book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, when there are too many 'anomalies' and 'exceptions' that do not fit into the current generally accepted paradigm then a 'paradigm shift' will occur and a new paradigm is formed. Of course Kuhn acknowledges the existence of the anomalies in any given paradigm but during the 'crisis' the followers of the old paradigm have to decide whether there has been a sufficient level of 'anomalies' and 'exceptions' in order to reject it or for it to still be sustainable.

A way ahead: the clash of civilizations versus the clash of radicals and moderates

Huntington maintains that the central axis of world politics in the future will be the conflict between "the West versus the rest". He specifies this further by declaring that, "The central focus of conflict for the immediate future will be between the West and several Islamic-Confucian states." As several conflicts over the past decade demonstrate, so far this has not been the case. With hindsight, it seems that the central axis of world politics since the end of the Cold War has been the conflict between the radicals and moderates from different religious, ethnic and political groups. In a sense, Huntington

himself agrees with this hypothesis for he refers in his works repeatedly to “extremists”, “fundamentalists”, “terrorists”, “militant groups”, i.e. radicals of different groups as the main propagators of conflicts, and “moderates” as their main antagonists. For example in his book, he argues that in the “fault line wars” there was an underlying dynamics of the moderate and radical forces where “the radicals committed to achieving more extreme goals through violence”. I think it is unfortunate that Huntington focuses only on the radicals with ‘civilizational’ agenda and emphasizes only ‘civilizational’ factors of the past conflicts. Thus, he seems to overlook some of the worst conflicts over the past decade, the Rwandan genocide or the Maoist “People’s War” in Nepal.

Although Huntington himself stresses that his aim is not to advocate the conflict between civilizations, I as well as many critics, believe that his paradigm is harmful to global peace. Huntington makes the same mistake as many ‘culturalists’ who treat cultures as distinct blocs, whereas in reality there is an interrelation and interpenetration of cultures just as there is that of civilizations. Huntington’s desire to pigeonhole a whole planet at a time, when the intercivilizational connections are becoming more nuanced and complex, is unhelpful for the cause of moderates from all sides. As Seizaburo Sato points out in his essay “The Clash of Civilizations: A view from Japan” (IIPS “Asia Pacific Review”, 1997), “Huntington is not only inaccurate or wrong in some of the historical facts he presents in his analysis, but his thesis has the potential to be extremely dangerous if taken as a prescription for making policy.”

It is not clear whether Huntington seeks objectively to describe the dynamics of post-Cold War global politics (based on his interpretation of the events and determining factors) or on the other hand, promoting his analysis as an ‘ideological tool’ to be used by the ‘Schmittian’ policy makers to orient themselves in a world where the familiar ‘foe’ has disappeared. Huntington seems to present himself as a ‘realist’ who has recognized that we have to make ‘tough’ foreign policy choices in the present in order to deal with the reality he himself has misdescribed.

Huntington’s paradigm is neither an illustrative ‘metaphor’ nor an objective analysis of what is actually happening in global politics today but rather a prescription for how global politics should be seen from the civilizational perspective. In a way, it is an ‘ideology’ as a way of forming a ‘new reality’. Hence, there are certain similarities between Huntington’s *The Clash of Civilizations* and Marx and Engels’ Communist Manifesto of 1848. There is also a danger that Huntington’s ‘civilizational paradigm’ might become a certain type of “civilizational ideology”, i.e. a ‘spectre haunting the world’, when radicals from different civilizations misuse and misinterpret Huntington’s hypothesis in order to provoke a genuine clash of civilizations and ‘let the other civilizations tremble’.

Huntington’s hypothesis doesn’t seem to have a great deal of explanatory power, but is very attractive as a kind of ‘noble lie’, used by radicals to consolidate public opinion in

their respective camps and providing the Machiavellian *virtu* to resist and ultimately shape the seemingly chaotic flow of global events. In this context, gaining access to military, political and economic superpower by the radicals with a right-wing Christian agenda, who believe that Huntington provided their cause with a theoretical and empiric foundation, is a dangerous global development. For only the radicals with effective political sovereignty and sufficient global capacity are able to establish and maintain 'friend/foe' distinction that is required to impose upon a fluid global politics a large-scale determinacy.

I believe that acute danger would arise should the radicals start co-operating more effectively with each other than the moderates, e.g., a coalition of the likes of Timothy McVeigh (Oklahoma City bombing), Osama bin Laden (the World Trade Center and the Pentagon bombing), and Baruch Goldstein (assassin of the Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin). One hopes that the UN, the EU, NATO and other intercivilizational organizations can and will continue to provide an important forum for moderates of all sides to co-operate effectively with each other in the fight against various forms of radicalism, extremism, and militant fundamentalism.

There are several implications of the clash of the radicals and moderates hypothesis, some of which are also aligned with Huntington's theory. Similarly to Huntington, I believe that "for the relevant future, there will be no universal civilization, but instead a world of different civilizations, each of which will have to learn to coexist with the others". Thus, global peace and international order depend on how successfully and efficiently the moderates from all civilizations, religions, nations, ethnic and political groups co-operate. This implication is in line with Huntington's conclusion, "the futures of both peace and Civilization depend upon understanding and cooperation among the political, spiritual, and intellectual leaders of the world's major civilizations." In order to do this, all sides, not just the West, have "to develop a more profound understanding of the basic religious and philosophical assumptions underlying other civilizations".

I think that the leaders of the European Union took an important step against the clash of civilizations paradigm in December 2004 when they decided, despite the opposition of sceptics from all sides, to invite Turkey, a secular Muslim country, to begin its EU accession process. As the British Prime Minister Tony Blair pointed out after the summit, this proves that "those who believe there is some fundamental clash of civilizations between Christian and Muslim are actually wrong". Furthermore, to follow up this line of thought, one can contend that Huntington's paradigm was proven wrong already in February 1952 when Turkey and Greece joined NATO.

Now if we look at the future of the EU, then despite the scepticism of many, including Huntington himself, it seems that other Muslim countries like Albania, as well as Bosnia and Herzegovina with a significant Muslim community, and perhaps even Kosovo, might

follow the Turkish lead. Thus it seems, fortunately, the EU, like NATO, will continue to be an intercivilizational 'exception' in Huntington's civilizational paradigm. Current NATO 'dialogues' with Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Algeria, Egypt, Mauritania, Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia, and Israel might also lead to further cross-civilizational expansion and result in other intercivilizational 'anomalies' in the future. The successful integration of nations from different civilizations within NATO and the EU are another proof that Huntington's hypothesis is not an adequate description of the dominant tendencies of today's global politics. Lets hope that there will be even more non-civilization "anomalies" and intercivilizational "exceptions" in the future so that we can overcome the clash of civilizations paradigm.

Fundamentally, it is still a question of identity and self-identity as is, according to Huntington, belonging to a certain civilization. It is 'us' versus 'them', but 'us' means the moderates, against 'them' the radicals. Thus in this clash of radicals and moderates, each one of us has to decide, "who we are?" - a radical or moderate.