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The Modernizing Imperative

Tradition and Change

*Jeane J. Kirkpatrick
and others*

I approach the work of Samuel P. Huntington with keen interest and high expectations. Like most political scientists, I have learned much from his writings. Now in his article "The Clash of Civilizations?" he once again raises new questions.

In his essay, Huntington asserts that civilizations are real and important and predicts that "conflict between civilizations will supplant ideological and other forms of conflict as the dominant global form of conflict." He further argues that institutions for cooperation will be more likely to develop within civilizations, and conflicts will most often arise between groups in different civilizations. These strike me as interesting but dubious propositions.

Huntington's classification of contemporary civilizations is questionable. He identifies "seven or eight major civilizations" in the contemporary world: Western (which includes both European and North American variants), Confucian, Japanese, Islamic, Hindu, Slavic-Orthodox, Latin American "and possibly African."

This is a strange list.

If civilization is defined by common objective elements such as language, history, religion, customs and institutions and, subjectively, by identification, and if it is the broadest collectivity with which persons intensely identify, why distinguish "Latin American" from "Western" civilization? Like North America, Latin America is a continent settled by Europeans who brought with them European languages and a European version of Judeo-Christian religion, law, literature and gender roles. The Indian component in Latin American culture is more important in some countries (Mexico, Guatemala, Ecuador and Peru) than in North America. But the African influence is more important in the United States than in all but a few Latin American countries (Brazil, Belize and Cuba). Both North and South America are "Western" European with an admixture of other elements.

And what is Russia if not "Western"? The East/West designations of the Cold

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War made sense in a European context, but in a global context Slavic/Orthodox people are Europeans who share in Western culture. Orthodox theology and liturgy, Leninism and Tolstoy are expressions of Western culture.

It is also not clear that over the centuries differences between civilizations have led to the longest and most violent conflicts. At least in the twentieth century, the most violent conflicts have occurred within civilizations: Stalin's purges, Pol Pot's genocide, the Nazi holocaust and World War II. It could be argued that the war between the United States and Japan involved a clash of civilizations, but those differences had little role in that war. The Allied and Axis sides included both Asian and European members.

The liberation of Kuwait was no more a clash between civilizations than World War II or the Korean or Vietnamese wars. Like Korea and Vietnam, the Persian Gulf War pitted one non-Western Muslim government against another. Once aggression had occurred, the United States and other Western governments became involved for geopolitical reasons that transcended cultural differences. Saddam Hussein would like the world to believe otherwise.

After the United States mobilized an international coalition against Iraq, Saddam Hussein, until then the leader of a revolutionary secular regime, took to public prayers and appeals for solidarity to the Muslim world. Certain militant, anti-Western Islamic fundamentalists, Huntington reminds us, responded with assertions that it was a war of "the West against Islam." But few believed it. More governments of predominantly Muslim

societies rallied to support Kuwait than to "save" Iraq.

In Bosnia, the efforts of Radovan Karadzic and other Serbian extremists to paint themselves as bulwarks against Islam are no more persuasive, although the passivity of the European Community, the United States, NATO and the United Nations in the face of Serbia's brutal aggression against Bosnia has finally stimulated some tangible Islamic solidarity. But most governments of predominantly Muslim states have been reluctant to treat the Bosnian conflict as a religious war. The Bosnian government itself has resisted any temptation to present its problem as Islam versus the Judeo-Christian world. The fact that Serbian forces began their offensive against Croatia and Slovenia should settle the question of Serbian motives and goals, which are territorial aggrandizement, not holy war.

Indubitably, important social, cultural and political differences exist between Muslim and Judeo-Christian civilizations. But the most important and explosive differences involving Muslims are found within the Muslim world—between persons, parties and governments who are reasonably moderate, nonexpansionist and nonviolent and those who are anti-modern and anti-Western, extremely intolerant, expansionist and violent. The first target of Islamic fundamentalists is not another civilization, but their own governments. "Please do not call them Muslim fundamentalists," a deeply religious Muslim friend said to me. "They do not represent a more fundamental version of the Muslim religion. They are simply Muslims who are also violent political extremists."

Elsewhere as well, the conflict between fanaticism and constitutionalism, between totalitarian ambition and the rule of law, exists within civilizations in a clearer, purer form than between them. In Asia the most intense conflict may turn out to be between different versions of being Chinese or Indian.

Without a doubt, civilizations are important. By eroding the strength of local and national cultures and identifications, modernization enhances the importance of larger units of identification such as civilizations. Huntington is also surely right that global communication and stepped-up migration exacerbate conflict by bringing diametrically opposed values and life-styles into direct contact with one another. Immigration brings exotic practices into schools, neighborhoods and other institutions of daily life and challenges the cosmopolitanism of Western societies. Religious tolerance in the abstract is one thing; veiled girls in French schoolrooms are quite another. Such challenges are not welcome anywhere.

But Huntington, who has contributed so much to our understanding of modernization and political change, also knows the ways that modernization changes people, societies and politics. He knows the many ways that modernization equals Westernization—broadly conceived—and that it can produce backlash and bitter hostility. But he also knows how powerful is the momentum of modern, Western ways of science, technology, democracy and free markets. He knows that the great question for non-Western societies is whether they can be modern without being Western.

He believes Japan has succeeded. Maybe.

He is probably right that most societies will simultaneously seek the benefits of modernization and of traditional relations. To the extent that they and we are successful in preserving our traditions while accepting the endless changes of modernization, our differences from one another will be preserved, and the need for not just a pluralistic society but a pluralistic world will grow ever more acute.

Do Civilizations Hold?

ALBERT L. WEEKS

Samuel P. Huntington has resurrected an old controversy in the study of international affairs: the relationship between “microcosmic” and “macrocosmic” processes. Partisans of the former single out the nation state as the basic unit, or determining factor, in the yin and yang of world politics. The “macros,” on the other hand, view world affairs on the lofty level of the civilizations to which nation states belong and by which their behavior is allegedly largely determined.

To one degree or another, much of the latter school’s thinking, although they may be loath to admit it, derives from Oswald Spengler, Arnold Toynbee, Quincy Wright, F. N. Parkinson and others. In contrast, scholars such as Hans J. Morgenthau, John H. Herz and Raymond Aron have tended to hew to the “micro” school.

Both schools began debating the issue vigorously back in the 1950s. That Huntington is resurrecting the controversy 40 years later is symptomatic of the failure of globalism—specifically the idea of establishing a “new world order”—to take root

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and of the failure to make sense of contradictory trends and events. His aim is to find new, easily classified determinants of contemporary quasi-chaotic international behavior and thus to get a handle on the international kaleidoscope.

His methodology is not new. In arguing the macro case in the 1940s, Toynbee distinguished what he called primary, secondary and tertiary civilizations by the time of their appearance in history, contending that their attributes continued to influence contemporary events. Wright, likewise applying a historical method, classified civilizations as "bellicose" (including Syrian, Japanese and Mexican), "moderately bellicose" (Germanic, Western, Russian, Scandinavian, etc.) and "most peaceful" (such as Irish, Indian and Chinese). Like Toynbee and now Huntington, he attributed contemporary significance to these factors. Huntington's classification, while different in several respects from those of his illustrious predecessors, also identifies determinants on a grand scale by "civilizations."

His endeavor, however, has its own fault lines. The lines are the borders encompassing each distinct nation state and mercilessly chopping the alleged civilizations into pieces. With the cultural and religious glue of these "civilizations" thin and cracked, with the nation state's political regime providing the principal bonds, crisscross fracturing and cancellation of Huntington's own macro-scale, somewhat anachronistic fault lines are inevitable.

The world remains fractured along political and possibly geopolitical lines; cultural and historical determinants are a great deal less vital and virulent. Politics, regimes and ideologies are culturally, his-

torically and "civilizationally" determined to an extent. But it is willful, day-to-day, crisis-to-crisis, war-to-war political decision-making by nation-state units that remains the single most identifiable determinant of events in the international arena. How else can we explain repeated nation-state "defections" from their collective "civilizations"? As Huntington himself points out, in the Persian Gulf War "one Arab state invaded another and then fought a coalition of Arab, Western and other states."

Raymond Aron described at length the primacy of a nation state's political integrity and independence, its inviolable territoriality and sovereign impermeability. He observed that "men have believed that the fate of cultures was at stake on the battlefields at the same time as the fate of provinces." But, he added, the fact remains that sovereign states "are engaged in a competition for power [and] conquests In our times the major phenomenon [on the international scene] is the heterogeneity of state units [not] supranational aggregations."

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The West Is Best

GERARD PIEL

We must be in terror of the civilizations conjured by Samuel P. Huntington for the same reason that Nils Bohr admonished us to fear ghosts: We see them, and we know they are not there!

We have another reason to be in terror of them. Without boundaries, interiors or exteriors, continuity or coherent

entity, any of the Huntington civilizations can be summoned in a moment to ratify whatever action the West and its remaining superpower deem rightful. Now they fit the Eric Ericsson definition of the pseudo-species, outside the law.

In the end, "the West and the Rest" offers a more useful analysis. We can recognize these ghostly civilizations as the developing countries and the countries in transition.

They all aspire to the Western model. They are still engaged in conquest of the material world. As they proceed with their industrialization, they progressively embrace the "Western ideas," in Huntington's litany, "of individualism, liberalism, constitutionalism, human rights, equality, liberty, the rule of law, democracy, free markets...."

At the primary level it is a function of lengthening life expectancy; people in those countries are beginning to live long enough to discover they have rights and to assert them. Mass education, which comes with Westernizing industrialization, makes its contribution as well. Tiananmen Square in Beijing and the massing of the people at the parliament building in Moscow stand as rites in a passage.

How long the process will take depends on how the West responds to the needs and the disorder that beset the emerging and developing nations—in fear or in rational quest of the common future. The question is: Do Western ideas have more substance than those pseudo-civilizations?

GERARD PIEL is Chairman Emeritus of Scientific American, Inc. 🌐

The Clash of Civilizations *The Debate*

Samuel P. Huntington's ground-breaking article "The Clash of Civilizations?" in the Summer 1993 issue of *Foreign Affairs* made headlines. It has been called, by some, "the 'X' article of the post-Cold War era."

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