Building Up New Bogeymen

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THE CLASH OF CIVILIZATIONS AND THE REMAKING OF WORLD ORDER
by Samuel P. Huntington
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Samuel Huntington's *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* is an ambitious attempt to formulate a conceptual framework that can help citizens and policymakers to make sense of the post-Cold War world. Instead of focusing on power and ideology-as we did during the Cold War-Huntington's paradigm emphasizes cultural competition.

Huntington's central thesis is straightforward. "In the post-Cold War world," he writes, "the most important distinctions among peoples are not ideological, political, or economic. They are cultural." Identities and loyalties are shifting from the state to the broader cultural entity of "civilization," and this shift is creating a radically different world order. "For the first time in history," he maintains, "global politics has become multipolar and multicivilizational." As a result, conflicts between civilizations will be more frequent than conflicts within them, and "the most pervasive, important, and dangerous conflicts will . . . [be] between peoples belonging to different cultural entities."

There are at least three reasons why *The Clash of Civilizations* is likely to enjoy a longer shelf life than some other efforts to formulate a post-Cold War paradigm. First, Huntington presents his argument with great skill and with a keen eye for the apt anecdote. Huntington has always been an adroit conceptualizer, and his knack for subsuming diverse phenomena into simple and memorable frameworks is evident throughout the book. He is also a master of the scholarly sound bite, as in his observation that "in Islam, God is Caesar; in China and Japan, Caesar is God; in Orthodoxy, God is Caesar's junior partner." These stylistic felicities make the book a lively read and greatly enhance the seductiveness of its argument.

Second, cultural explanations are very much in vogue these days, whether the subject is foreign policy, educational performance, gender roles, or family values. Huntington's arguments are thus in step with current intellectual fashions, even if many intellectuals will probably recoil from some of his conclusions.

Third, Huntington's arguments possess a powerful prima facie plausibility. We all know that cultural differences can foster misunderstanding and suspicion, and even a superficial reading of history reveals that groups from different cultural backgrounds have fought on countless occasions. A brief read of any newspaper seems to offer further support for a cultural perspective: "Western" Croats, Muslims, and "Orthodox" Serbs are at odds in Bosnia; Muslims and Hindus are quarreling over Kashmir; "Orthodox" Russians and Armenians have been fighting Muslim Chechens and Azerbaijanis; and trouble may now be brewing between China and its various non-Sinic neighbors. At first glance, therefore, recent events seem to be remarkably in sync with Huntington's assertions.

Yet despite these strengths, the book's central thesis does not stand up to close scrutiny. Huntington does not explain why loyalties are suddenly shifting from the level of nation-states to that of "civilizations," and he does not explain why this alleged shift will lead to greater intercivilizational conflict. Moreover, some of his central claims are contradicted by both historical and contemporary evidence. Finally, Huntington's focus on the broad concept of civilization has led him to overlook or obscure the far more potent role of nationalism. As a result, The Clash of Civilizations is an unreliable guide to the emerging world order and a potentially dangerous blueprint for policy.

A BLUEPRINT FOR POLICY?

Huntington begins by defining a civilization as the "highest cultural grouping of people and the broadest level of cultural identity. . defined by . . . language, history, religion, customs, institutions, and by the subjective selfidentification of people." Drawing upon the work of historians such as William McNeill, Fernand Braudel, Carroll Quigley, and Oswald Spengler, Huntington identifies six contemporary civilizations (Hindu, Islamic, Japanese, Orthodox, Sinic, and Western) and two possible candidates (African and Latin American). Five of these eight civilizations have a dominant core state (India, Japan, Russia, China, and the United States), but the African, Islamic, and Latin American civilizations do not.

According to Huntington, the future world order will be shaped by several powerful trends. First, the era of Western dominance is coming to an end, and several non-Western states are emerging as great powers in their own right. Second, these new great powers increasingly reject Western values in favor of their own cultural norms, and the continuing decline in the West's material superiority will erode its cultural appeal even more. Thus, Huntington rejects the belief that modernization is leading to cultural convergence between the West and "the rest." Third, as different civilizations become more tightly connected by markets and media and as universalist ideologies like Marxism-Leninism or liberalism cease to command belief, the broad cultural values embodied in each civilization will become more important as sources of personal and political identity. Taken together, these trends herald the emergence of a new multipolar world in which each of the great powers is the core state of a different civilization. For Huntington, the end of the Cold War is the critical historical divide between the old world of national rivalries and the new world of clashing civilizations.

What will world politics look like in this multipolar, multicivilizational world? Huntington recognizes that states remain the key actors in world politics, but he believes that they increasingly define their interests in civilizational terms. As a result, "they cooperate with and ally themselves with states with similar or common culture and are more often in conflict with countries of different culture." Or, as he says elsewhere, "alignments defined by ideology and superpower relations are giving way to alignments defined by culture and civilization." It follows that conflicts will occur either in "cleft countries" defined as states where large segments of the population belong to different civilizations, like Ukraine-or in the "fault-line wars" that occur along the boundaries between two or more civilizations. The latter conflicts are likely to be especially complex, as local antagonists try to rally support from their cultural brethren and especially from the core state (if there is one). The chief danger is the possibility that one or more of these "fault-line wars" will escalate into a great-power conflict that transcends civilizational boundaries.

For the West, two dangers are especially salient. The first is Islam, where a demographic explosion, a cultural resurgence, and the absence of a strong core state combine to create a high propensity for conflict. Huntington recognizes that Islam is deeply divided and relatively

weak (its share of world economic product is less than one-fourth that of the West), but these facts do not afford him much comfort. Indeed, he sees Islam and the West as very nearly at war already, observing that "dedicated Islamic militants exploit the open societies of the West and plant car bombs at selected targets. Western military professionals exploit the open skies of Islam and drop smart bombs on selected targets." He believes that the challenge from Islam is inherently cultural and likely to be prolonged.

The second challenge arises from Asia, and especially from China. If the Islamic threat is partly a reflection of the unruly energies of millions of mobilized young Muslims, the Asian threat derives from the order and discipline that has fueled Asia's economic ascendance. Asian societies are rejecting the individualistic culture of the West, their economic success has reinforced their self-confidence and desire for greater global influence, and Huntington sees a clash of interests-and thus, a clash of civilizations-as virtually inevitable.

Huntington's prescriptions follow directly from his basic framework. In a world characterized by civilizational divisions, he favors greater political, economic, and military integration among the member states of the West; advocates expanding NATO to include other Western states (such as the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland); and wants to bring Latin America into the Western fold while preventing Japan from moving toward China. Because the Sinic and Islamic civilizations pose the greatest threats, the West should also accept Russian hegemony among the Orthodox countries and strive to limit the growth of Sinic and Islamic power. On the home front, the United States must prevent advocates of "multiculturalism" from undermining the West's cultural traditions and encourage immigrants to embrace Western values. Huntington also warns that Western intervention in the affairs of other civilizations will be "the single most dangerous source of instability," but he does not suggest that we abstain from such activities entirely.

This summary does not do full justice to Huntington's often insightful analysis. He neatly debunks claims of cultural convergence and bolsters his own arguments with numerous examples of cross-cultural conflict. His analysis of the dynamics of "fault-line" conflicts is especially intriguing, as is his discussion of the conflictive character of contemporary Islamic societies. The civilizational paradigm has the merit of simplicity, and it seems to make sense of some important contemporary events. So why not simply send a copy of the book to every head of state, legislator, and senior government official in the West and gird our loins for the kulturkampf that lies ahead?

To fully grasp why The Clash of Civilizations should not become the blueprint for U.S. (let alone "Western") foreign policy, we must first consider what world politics was like in the past. Doing so will highlight how Huntington believes it is changing and help us to see the flaws in his argument.

DISSECTING THE THESIS What was world politics like prior to the end of the Cold War, which Huntington identifies as the starting point for the new era of cultural competition? For the past 200 years or so, states-and especially the great powers-have been the key actors in world affairs. It was generally recognized that some of these states belonged to different civilizations, but nobody argued that these differences mattered very much for understanding international politics. Cultural differences did matter, but their main political expression took the form of nationalism. The belief that distinct cultural groups-or nations should have their own state proved to be an extremely powerful political ideology, and it reinforced the state system that has existed since the mid-17th centurv.

Great-power conflict was a common occurrence throughout this period. Wars occasionally arose for essentially "cultural" (i.e., nationalist) reasons, most notably in the War of Italian Unification (1859) and the wars of German unification (1864, 1866, and 1870). For the most part, however, great-power conflict resulted from the combination of fear, greed, and stupidity that is characteristic of life in the anarchic world of international politics.

According to Huntington, great-power conflict before 1990 was largely, if not entirely, intracivilizational. In his words, "for over four hundred years, the nation-states of the West-Britain, France, Spain, Austria, Prussia, Germany, the United States, and others-constituted a multipolar international system within Western civilization and interacted, competed, and fought wars with each other." This characterization is wrong, however, because it omits the two non-Western great powers (Japan and Russia) that "interacted, competed, and fought wars" with the West (and with others) during these four centuries.

With Japan and Russia included, what does the historical record show? There have been four hegemonic conflicts since 1800 (the Napoleonic Wars, World War I, World War II, and the Cold War), all of which involved states from two or more civilizations. Moreover, most of the other wars involving great powers (including their colonial wars) were intercivilizational as well. Thus, Huntington is wrong to claim that "in the post-Cold War world, for the first time in history, global politics has become multipolar and multicivilizational."

Among other things, this error casts doubt on Huntington's claim that the end of the Cold War constitutes a radical historical watershed. It also means that he cannot use past intercivilizational wars as support for his own thesis, because these various conflicts did not arise from the cultural or "civilizational" differences that Huntington now sees as central to world politics.

At this point, one begins to suspect that Huntington has merely given a new label to an old phenomenon: Sometimes states with different cultural backgrounds fight with one another. Such a view receives support from Huntington himself, when he writes that "the sources of conflict between states and groups from different civilizations are, in large measure, those which have always generated conflict between groups: control of people, territory, wealth, and resources, and relative power." Yet he clearly believes that something is different today, or why bother to formulate a new paradigm?

The novel feature is a shift in personal identities. He still regards states as the key actors in world politics but argues that the end of the Cold War has been accompanied by a profound shift in the locus of political loyalty. In a direct challenge to the concept of nationalism, he asserts that both the elites and the masses will increasingly identify with other states in their specific cultural group and that this shift in identities will largely eliminate conflict within each civilization while exacerbating tensions between them.

It is important to recognize how fundamental and far-reaching this claim is. For the past 2,000 years or so, assorted empires, citystates, tribes, and nation-states have repeatedly ignored cultural affinities in order to pursue particular selfish interests. These political units have always been willing to fight other members of their own civilization and have been equally willing to ally with groups from different civilizations when it seemed advantageous to do so. Huntington now claims that states are going to act very differently, however, and will place cultural values above all others.

Yet Huntington never explains why loyalties are shifting in the manner he depicts. He asserts that globalization and the increased contact between different cultures have made broad civilizational identities more powerful, but he provides no theory explaining why this is the case. Why are "civilizational" loyalties now trumping nationalism? Why is culture or ethnicity no longer focused on the state, but on the broader notion of "civilization"? Huntington provides no answer to these questions.

Not only is an answer lacking, but many of his examples of increasing cultural assertiveness are not about "civilizational" consciousness at all. To support his claim that the end of the Cold War led to a global "identity crisis," for example, he notes that "questions of national identity were actively debated . . . [in] Algeria, Canada, China, Germany, Great Britain, India, Iran, Japan, Mexico, Morocco, Russia, South Africa, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey, Ukraine, and the United States." Most of these "questions of identity" arose from nationalist movements rather than from any "civilizational" affinity, however, and thus do not support his thesis.

Moreover, although The Clash of Civilizations devotes roughly 300 pages to a cultural analysis of world politics, Huntington never explains why conflict is more likely to arise between civilizations than within them. He suggests that cultural values are not easily compromised and that people "naturally distrust and see as threats those who are different and have the capability to harm them." Yet even if these propositions are correct-and I am inclined to agree with him on the last one-they do not explain why intercivilizational conflicts will shape the future world order.

Cultural differences do not cause war by themselves, just as cultural similarities do not guarantee harmony. Indeed, one could argue that cultural diversity makes conflict less likely, provided different groups are free to establish their own political and social orders. As Huntington's own analysis of "cleft states" suggests, cultural clashes are most likely not when separate groups come into contact, but when members of different cultures are forced to live in the same community. Once again, many of Huntington's more compelling examples of cultural conflict come from local settings rather than from true "civilizational" clashes. But the ways in which members of different cultures interact within a single community are quite different from the ways in which whole civilizations interact on a global scale.

Finally, the evidence in favor of Huntington's thesis is quite thin. As we have seen, past examples of intercivilizational conflict do not support his thesis, because these were simply conflicts of interest between states and not the result of "civilizational" differences. Given that Huntington sees the civilizational paradigm as relevant only for the post-Cold War period, we have roughly six years of experience with which to evaluate his claims. What does the record show thus far? Huntington supports his argument by reference to numerous examples of contemporary political leaders employing cultural or even civilizational rhetoric. Not surprisingly, he takes these statements at face value and regards them as persuasive evidence of growing civilizational affinities. But the question is not just what Lee Kuan Yew or Muammar Qadaffi say, because talk is cheap and political rhetoric serves many functions. The real issue is what these leaders (or their countries) will actually do, and how much blood and treasure they will devote to "civilizational" interests.

On this point, the record of state behavior since 1990 does not lend much support to Huntington's argument. Consider the 1991 Persian Gulf war. Huntington's paradigm predicts that conflicts between civilizations will be more frequent and intense than conflicts within them. Yet in the Gulf war, Iraq attacked a fellow Islamic state, only to be repulsed by a coalition of Western and Islamic states, with tacit support from Israel. Huntington tries to salvage his thesis

by arguing that most Islamic populations actually favored Iraq, but, even if this were true, it merely underscores the fact that state interests mattered more than loosely felt and politically impotent loyalties to a particular "civilizational" entity. In the Gulf war, in short, civilizational identities were irrelevant.

What about Bosnia, where Muslims, "Western" Croats, and "Orthodox" Serbs were at war from 1991 to 1995? Although some aspects of the Bosnian tragedy are consistent with Huntington's argument, the overall picture is a striking refutation of it. More than 50,000 U.S.-led troops were deployed to Bosnia in 1996, but they were not there to defend Western (in this case, Croatian) culture. Rather, they were there primarily to protect Muslims. Indeed, although several Islamic countries did send modest amounts of aid to the Bosnian Muslims, the Western states ultimately did far more for them than did their Islamic brethren. Similarly, Russia offered some rhetorical support to the Serbs, but it backed away from its "Orthodox" brethren when Serbian bellicosity made Belgrade an unappealing ally. Even the Western states failed to line up according to cultural criteria, with Britain and France being more sympathetic to the Serbs, Germany backing the Croats, and the United States reserving most of its support for the Muslims.

What about the Rwandan genocide and the subsequent carnage in Zaire? Huntington is not certain whether a true "African civilization" exists, but it is abundantly clear that these bloodlettings did not arise from a clash of civilizations. And, as in the earlier humanitarian mission in Somalia, outside assistance is being provided by members of other civilizations, once again irrespective of the cultural criterion Huntington now claims is paramount. Thus, conflict and cooperation do not observe the civilizational boundaries that Huntington's thesis predicts. Interestingly, The Clash of Civilizations provides decisive evidence on precisely this point. On pages 256 to 258, Huntington presents two tables on current ethnopolitical conflicts in order to demonstrate the conflictive nature of contemporary Islam. These tables also show that conflicts within civilizations are roughly 50 per cent more frequent than conflicts between them. This result directly contradicts Huntington's core thesis, because the number of potential conflicts between members of different civilizations is much greater than the number of potential conflicts between members of the same civilization. For example, there are roughly 20 "Western" states with which the United States could find itself at odds, but there are more than 175 non-Western states that the United States could quarrel with as well. Even if conflict occurred on a purely random basis, we would expect most clashes to be between groups from different "civilizations." This gap should be even more pronounced if "civilizational" differences are a powerful cause of conflict, as Huntington posits, but the evidence he presents shows that exactly the opposite is occurring. This result merely underscores the fact that cultural differences are of secondary importance in explaining the origins of global conflict in the post-Cold War world.

The Clash of Civilizations is also strangely silent about Israel, which has been a central concern for U.S. foreign policy since its founding in 1948. During the Cold War, U.S. support for Israel could be justified on both ideological and strategic grounds. From a cultural perspective, however, the basis for close ties between Israel and the "West" is unclear. Israel is not a member of the West (at least not by Huntington's criteria) and is probably becoming less "Western" as religious fundamentalism becomes more salient and as the Sephardic population becomes more influential. A "civilizational" approach to U.S. foreign policy can justify close ties with Europeans (as the common descendants of Western Christendom) but not Israelis. Moreover, given that Huntington wants to avoid unnecessary clashes with rival civilizations and given that U.S. support for Israel is a source of tension with the Islamic world, his civilizational paradigm would seem to prescribe a sharp reduction in Western support for the Jewish state. I do not know whether Huntington favors such a step, but that is where the logic of his argument

leads. His silence on this issue may reflect an awareness that making this conclusion explicit would not enhance the appeal of the book, or Israel may simply be an anomaly that lies outside of his framework. In either case, however, the issue reveals a further limitation of the civilizational paradigm. What has gone wrong here? As should now be apparent, Huntington's central error is his belief that personal loyalties are increasingly centered on "civilizations" rather than on the nation-state. If there is a dominant trend in the world today, however, it is not the coalescing of a half-dozen or so multinational civilizations. On the contrary, the dominant trend is the tendency for existing political communities to split into smaller units, organized primarily along ethnic or national lines. Being part of some larger "civilization" did not convince the Abkhaz, Armenians, Azeris, Chechens, Croats, Eritreans, Georgians, Kurds, Ossetians, Quebecois, Serbs, or Slovaks to abandon the quest for their own state, just as being part of the West did not slow Germany's rush to reunify. Thus, it is not civilization that is thriving in the post-Cold War world; it is nationalism.

This neglect of nationalism is the Achilles' heel of the civilizational paradigm. As Huntington himself points out, "civilizations" do not make decisions; they are an abstract cultural category rather than a concrete political agency. States, on the other hand, have defined borders, designated leaders, established decision-making procedures, and direct control over political resources. States can mobilize their citizens, collect taxes, issue threats, reward friends, and wage war; in other words, states can act. Nationalism is a tremendously powerful force precisely because it marries individual cultural affinities to an agency-the state-that can actually do something. In the future as in the past, the principal conflicts in the world will be between states-not civilizations-and between existing states and groups within them who seek to establish states of their own. Some of these conflicts will occur across cultural boundaries-as in the "fault-line" areas that Huntington correctly highlights-but cultural differences will be at best a secondary cause of conflict.

Once again, Huntington's analysis implicitly acknowledges this point. His emphasis on the "core states" within each civilization reaffirms the central role of the great powers-defined in traditional realist terms-and he admits that "the issues in [core state conflicts] are the classic ones of international politics," such as relative influence, economic and military power, and the control of territory. When it comes to the great powers, therefore, culture does not matter very much, and the concept of civilization largely drops out of his analysis.

The enduring relevance of the realist, statist paradigm is most clearly revealed at the end of the book, when Huntington lays out a possible scenario for a war between China and the West. Several details of this imagined war are striking. First, it begins with a Chinese attack on Vietnam, which by Huntington's criteria is a clash within a particular civilizational group. Thus, World War III is caused not by a clash of civilizations, but by a clash within one-precisely the sort of event that increasing cultural affinities were supposed to overcome. Second, cultural factors play virtually no role either in starting the war or in causing it to escalate; instead, it arises from a competition for oil and escalates because other states are worried about the long-term balance of power. Third, the subsequent war features a number of important intercivilizational alliances (for balance-of power reasons), which further contradicts the claim that cultural factors are becoming decisive. In short, when he turns away from expounding his paradigm and describes what a 21st-century conflict might actually look like, Huntington largely ignores his own creation and relies on the traditional principles of realpolitik.

A CALL FOR NEW ENEMIES?

In the end, The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order is a book replete with ironies. It is ironic that a scholar whose earlier works offered brilliant analyses of the role of the state now offers a paradigm in which states are the handmaidens of diffuse cultural groups. It is also ironic that a scholar who effectively challenged the "declinist" arguments made by Paul Kennedy and others now goes them one better: Not only is the United States declining, but so is the rest of Western civilization. And it is surely ironic that a scholar who was sounding alarm bells about Japan only four years ago is now obsessed with China and Islam and is calling for active efforts to preserve Japan's ties with the West.

There may be a common theme in these ironies, however. Huntington has always been a staunch defender of Western civilization in general and the United States in particular, and he is clearly worried that the hedonistic, individualistic culture of the West is no longer up to the challenges it faces. By portraying the contemporary world as one of relentless cultural competition, therefore, he may be trying to provide us with the bogeymen we need to keep our own house in order.

He may be right, and a reaffirmation of certain "Western" values might be wholly desirable. But even if the West does need new enemies in order to hold it together, the civilizational paradigm that Huntington has offered is not a sound basis for making foreign policy. Relying upon an overly broad category like "civilization" would blind us to the differences within broad cultural groups and limit our ability to pursue a strategy of "divide and conquer." Thus, adopting Huntington's paradigm might unwittingly rob policymakers of the flexibility that has always been a cardinal diplomatic virtue. If the world is as dangerous as he seems to think, why limit our options in this way?

Moreover, if we treat all states who are part of some other "civilization" as intrinsically hostile, we are likely to create enemies that might otherwise be neutral or friendly. In fact, a civilizational approach to foreign policy is probably the surest way to get diverse foreign cultures to coordinate their actions and could even bring several civilizations together against us. The West is still the strongest civilization and will remain so for some time to come. Accordingly, a civilizational strategy could encourage two or more civilizations to gang up on us, solely out of a sense of self-preservation. In this sense, The Clash of Civilizations offers a dangerous, self-fulfilling prophecy: The more we believe it and make it the basis for action, the more likely it is to come true. Huntington would no doubt feel vindicated, but the rest of us would not be happy with the results.

*For his earlier views, see Samuel P. Huntington, "The U.S.-Decline or Renewal?" Foreign Affairs 67:2 (Winter 1988/89); "America's Changing Strategic Interests," Survival 33:1 (January 1991); and "Why International Primacy Matters," International Security 17:4 (Spring 1993).

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