

## FEARS OF THE FUTURE. CIVILIZATIONS IN THE THIRD MILLENNIUM

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This paper is a reaction to S. P. Huntington's article on civilization as a possible risk factor in future conflicts throughout the world. Huntington overestimates the role of civilizational incompatibility, underestimating at the same time factors of economic nature. In addition, some of his key conceptions and terms are defined in a somewhat vague manner.

The relatively quiet waters of academic history and ever turbulent torrents of mass media were some time ago stirred by Samuel P. Huntington's paper titled *The Clash of Civilizations?* (Huntington 1993). Huntington is director of the John M. Olin Institute for Strategic Studies at Harvard University, and the dominant idea of his article would be easier to understand when perceived as a product of the Institute's project "*The Changing Security Environment and American National Interests.*" The author introduces his hypothesis as follows: "... the fundamental source of conflict in this new world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural" (Huntington 1993: 22). Does Huntington view this "latest phase" as an overture to an era of universal peace or as the end of history in the spirit analogous to Francis Fukuyama?

Huntington's statement is a hypothesis, and the validity of any hypothesis depends upon its explanatory force. The course of historical process, however, is channelled by so many major, minor or seemingly random factors that Huntington's hypothesis will finally befall the same fate as any other hypothesis in the past — that it will be either refuted or at least duly modified.

One of the demands put upon a hypothesis is that its basic terms and concepts ought to be unambiguously and clearly defined.

Huntington's basic concepts include civilization in general, culture, ideology, and the particular civilizations; special attention is paid to the distinction of "West" from all other regions ("West versus Rest").

Proposed definitions of the crucial concepts no doubt deserve our consideration if we want to arrive at some conclusions referring to the plausibility of particular hypothetic inferences.

Culture or civilization for that matter are characterized in a rather vague way. "A civilization is a cultural entity," maintains Huntington (Huntington 1993: 23). According to him, territorial or ethnic and religious communities have their distinctive cultures. The cultures of lower rank combine to produce cultures of a higher rank, e.g., that of a nation. The cultures of various nations of Europe taken together constitute European culture, which is termed civilization by Huntington. The European civilization displays features that clearly distinguish it from Islamic, Indian, Chinese and other civilizations. Among the diagnostic criteria, language, history, religion, customs, various institutions and subjective consciousness ought to be listed above all. And yet, let us add, no clearcut lines can be drawn between civilizations defined in terms of a set of criteria, at least if we are willing to accept polythetic classes (the members of which are not required to exhibit all crucial features). Monothetic classes do not overlap but polythetic classes certainly do, and we are well aware that the borderlines between civilizations are not watertight. A few examples will be introduced here. Serbs, Bosnian Muslims and Croats all speak (very much) the same language and participate in the same history. Why do they not perceive themselves as one whole? It is obviously religion that plays an overwhelming role in their identity, but even this does not fully explain the existing animosities. In another example, Albanians, who are mostly Muslims and partly also Catholics and Orthodox, view themselves first of all as Albanians. We could likewise contemplate the relevance of religion for the civilizational appurtenance of Koreans or Vietnamese, since a large proportion of both peoples profess Christianity, not to speak of the predominantly Christian Filipinos. And what about Egypt, Syria or Lebanon, three Islamic Arab countries with relatively numerous, both socially and economically important, Christian communities?

Huntington's characteristic of civilization is only one of many. There are definitions of civilization that emphasize the technological aspect of this notion. One would be tempted to admit that at least in this sense modern civilization has dominated almost the whole world, whereas in culture local, historically determined specificities and traditions prevail.

During the Cold War, the world was divided into the First, Second and Third Worlds. This division is obviously obsolete by now, and it is "far more meaningful now to group countries not in terms of their political or economic systems or in terms of their level of economic development but rather in terms of their culture and civilization" (Huntington 1993: 23). Should we do it, we would ignore deep, if not fatal, differences between the rich and the poor countries. Does Huntington underestimate this contrast because the poorest cannot threaten the power and stability of the West in the near future?

Where then do the fears of the future come from? Futurology is certainly on very thin ice. It can only rely upon linear extrapolation and lean upon available facts or trends. In other words, prognoses have to bet on the continuity of develop-

ment; otherwise they would have to be classified as prophecies. And yet history knows of upheavals, disturbances and unexpected developments that sometimes take by surprise those who count upon stability and continuity. Not a few historical events which were anticipated could not have been dated in advance, but occasionally turns occur that had not even been surmised.

Recent developments lead to a justified assumption that in the future the world will be threatened by clashes that can be, according to Huntington, clashes of civilizations. At present the horizon of the 21st century is darkened by earnest problems of the developing world, in which both the economic and social situations are steadily deteriorating. As for the Arab countries, the threat of fundamentalism perhaps should not be considered as a specifically Islamic or civilizational factor. It thrives in poor Arab countries such as Algeria and Egypt — Iran is not an Arab state — and the so-called Iraqi threat springs from geopolitical implications, power ambitions and the border problems, while the Iraqi regime seems to play only the role of a pretext. Wealthy Arab states of the Peninsula and in the Gulf region rank among the most loyal allies of the West and despite their Islamic orthodoxy (and true religious fundamentalism) are not perceived as a threat at all.

In my opinion, the condition in some of the Latin American countries is in many respects reminiscent of the Middle East, but the local tensions are channelled by a kind of fundamentalist Marxism into guerilla and terrorism instead of resulting in religiously veiled anti-Western movements.

Sub-Saharan Africa does not represent a global menace, and yet the excessive poverty might create a tangle of insolvable problems that could at least morally traumatize that part of the world that has not yet thrown off the dead weight of conscience. But this is by no means a threat of civilizational nature.

On the other hand, Japan in its relation to Europe and USA may and sometimes is perceived as such a potential threat. Japan is regarded by Huntington as a distinct civilization, which means that Japan's conflict with any other country would *ex definitione* be (also) a civilizational clash. It is open to debate as to what extent civilization is a key factor in this respect. True, the desire to catch up on the West or even overtake it has been simmering in Japan for a long time and at least in the beginning was nourished by fears of foreign dominance. The feeling of superiority was not completely unknown in Japan, and Pan-Asianism was simply a mask to hide global political ambitions (which certainly were not invented or adopted by the whole nation). The abrupt economic growth and expansion of Japan in the recent decades might be interpreted by some observers as a continuation of old strategy with new tactical means, but may power ambitions be identified with civilizational issues? By the way, if USA and Europe are familiar with methods employed by the Japanese in economics and international trade, could they not draw a lesson from their rival? Is it truly an impassable and inconvenient path?

Huntington distinguishes seven or eight major civilizations. These include Western, Confucian, Japanese, Islamic, Hindu, Slavic-Orthodox, Latin American and

possibly African (Huntington 1993: 25). One cannot but object to this list of labels more suitable for mass media than for a historical paper. This is especially true of Western civilization. This label covers West Europe, USA, Canada and obviously Australia and New Zealand. Latin American civilization is taken as a separate category, but the diagnostic criteria are not clearly specified (not only here but also in other instances). Are they perhaps linguistic (Spanish and Portuguese), religious (dominant Catholicism) or political (social system and poverty of the masses)? Does not a very similar complex of features occur in parts of Mediterranean Europe?

What about the borders of Slavic-Orthodox civilization? Which label should be tagged to Orthodox but non-Slavic Romania or to Greece?

Likewise there is no mention of Israel, which is despite its size an important Middle Eastern and geopolitical factor. Its relations with the Arab neighbours are and probably will still be strained.

Huntington's Western civilization is reminiscent of a club of elect countries of European extraction with traditions of the Western (not Orthodox) Church. So far this club has not accepted all nations which would like to join it as soon as possible. This club of the most developed countries feels the need to resist the demands and pressure of those nations that in the future might behave as more self-assured political subjects because of their remarkable economic achievements.

The so-called Western civilization is no doubt heir of the Western Church, and this heritage is presented by Huntington as one of the key diagnostic criteria. And yet this core has undergone systematic erosion to the extent where religion is often the object of derision. This is hardly surprising. If a society has promoted the gratification of individual demands to its norm, it may hardly be said to abide by moral principles (cf. Brzezinski 1993: 213).

The term Confucian civilization savours of instrumentalism. If it accentuates the adherence to the standards of Confucian ethics in thought and education (if not always in practice), then in addition to China it should encompass Korea, Vietnam and probably even Japan. In such a case the label Far Eastern civilization would be more appropriate. However, if it were meant to be restricted to China, then Chinese civilization would lead to the unpleasant consequence that each international conflict of China would automatically be classified as a civilizational clash.

Within Islamic civilization three "subdivisions" are distinguished; Arab, Turkic and Malay. What about Iran, India and Sub-Saharan Africa? There are more Muslims in the Indian subcontinent than anywhere else, and no one would dare to include them in one of the three above-mentioned subcivilizations. The term Malay should be replaced as misleading; in the sense employed here it is obsolete. In addition, Huntington does not even mention the ancient Islamic schism into Shi'a and Sunna that cannot be ignored either in religion or politics.

Huntington sees a potential threat to the West in the so-called Chinese-Islamic threat. Without excluding in advance such an alternative, it should be emphasized

that China would not fall into the arms of Muslims for sympathies of civilizational nature but rather for considerations of a political and economic nature.

The differences between civilizations are regarded by Huntington not only as real but also as fundamental. According to him they involve views concerning the relation of man to God, individual to group, citizen to state, children to parents, husband to wife, views of what are duties and rights of citizens, freedom and authority, and equality and hierarchy. Clashes between persons professing incongruous values and ways of life are especially painfully perceived where individuals belonging to incompatible civilizations mingle — especially in West European countries recently besieged by crowds of immigrants from North Africa and Middle East. The most serious friction arises between local communities and Muslims. The reasons should not be looked for only in the former intolerance of the West and its present secularization. Maintaining that Islam is essentially a tolerant religion is a delusion. Non-believers were often if not always second-class citizens in Islamic countries, Christians were not allowed to marry Muslim women, and conversion to Christianity was often most severely punished.

The existence of tensions caused by massive immigration is confirmed by excesses that occur from time to time and not only in Germany. Such clashes are in a way internal and cannot be equated to international conflicts because the policy of various countries is generally subject to different considerations.

The notion of West is defined in a vague way by Huntington. He employs it in several meanings. First, West is a Euro-American civilization, the extent of which coincides with the limits of the Western Church. Second, the West may be viewed as including the so-called Slavic-Orthodox civilization, especially when discussing relations to Islam or when characterizing the conflict between capitalist and former socialist countries as a conflict within the framework of Western civilization. And third, the West is an interest grouping of advanced West European and North American countries that may — in the near future more or less — accept some of the former socialist countries in the interest of their own security. Latin American and Slavic-Orthodox countries, states Huntington, may also join the West in the future (Huntington 1993: 45); here again political and economic issues seem to play a much more portentous role than civilizational considerations.

Despite the objections articulated here and elsewhere (cf. Ajami 1993; Mahbubani 1993; Binyan 1993), Huntington cannot be denied a good deal of foresight and courage in his endeavour to look behind the curtain of the future. One cannot resist appreciating his sincerity when he admits that the term “world community” may be a euphemism giving “global legitimacy to actions reflecting the interests of the United States and other Western powers” (Huntington 1993: 39). He soberly doubts that a universal civilization might embrace the whole world in near future. The non-European civilizations have been pursuing the goal of becoming modern without Westernization, and thus diverse civilizations should coexist in the next century.

Civilizational diversity can play no dramatic part in the modern world if people will be adequately acquainted with the existence of such diversity. However, this divergence can widen the gap between the nations or groupings of nations if their political and economic interests would be conflicting. The plausibility of Huntington's thesis would be higher if he had more explicitly defined his fundamental notions and paid more attention to the specificity of parallel non-civilizational variables.

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