

The Political Forum

*A review of social and political trends and events
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THE WEST Vs. THE ISLAMIC-CONFUCIAN CONNECTION

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Several weeks ago, I argued that so far as geopolitics is concerned "It Just Doesn't Get Any Better Than This;" that few nations in the entire history of the world have experienced the kind of unrivaled international economic and military superiority that the U.S. enjoys today.

I noted that I didn't think this happy state would go on forever, and said I would review in a future piece what some top foreign policy thinkers view as the principle long-term threats to the continuation of today's "good times." I had hoped to do this in one article. But it is apparent, after reviewing the articles I had in mind, that the task will have to be broken into several pieces. So this week, I thought I would make a start by looking at some of the views of one of the most brilliant and creative political scientists in America, Harvard's Samuel Huntington.

I'd like to begin by noting that there is no post-cold-war geopolitical paradigm around which today's foreign policy debates naturally occur. The Clinton foreign policy team has no one who appears capable of developing, or even proposing, such a model; and academia moves slowly when no such Washington catalyst exists. This causes discussions among the foreign policy community to appear, for the most part, very unfocused, as each participant defines his or her own starting point.

This situation can be contrasted with the foreign policy debate that went on throughout the cold war. Whether hawk or dove, Democrat or Republican, foreign policy gurus from 1947 until the fall of the Berlin Wall, invariably found themselves framing their arguments around America's policy of "containment." This policy was first set forth in an article by George Kennan in the July, 1947 issue of *Foreign Affairs*.

Kennan's paper, which was unsigned and therefore came to be known as the famous "X" paper, stated that the antagonism then being demonstrated by Soviet leadership toward the Western democracies was inherent in the internal system of power in the U.S.S.R. In response to this

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policy of antagonism, Kennan advocated a "long-term, patient but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansionist tendencies." Among other things, Kennan advocated a system of economic and technical aid to non-Communist countries to support his containment policies.

While no similar foreign policy paradigm exists today, an article in the Summer, 1993 issue of *Foreign Affairs*, entitled "The Clash of Civilizations," by Huntington has come close. One problem with the article is that, in contrast to Kennan, Huntington's recommendations for U.S. conduct are quite general. A second is that there is considerable disagreement in the foreign policy community with some of Huntington's underlying assumptions. But the article has nevertheless provided a focal point of sorts for a discussion among foreign policy mavens about America's role in the 21st century. It is for this reason that I have chosen it as a starting point.

On the macro front, Huntington argues that "world politics is entering a new phase;" that the "fundamental source of conflict in this new world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic," but will instead be cultural.

"Nation states will remain the most powerful actors in world affairs, but the principal conflicts of global politics will occur between nations and groups of different civilizations," he says. He notes that for 150 years after the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, the conflicts of the Western world were largely among "princes," who were attempting to expand their power bases. In the process, he says, they created nation states, and beginning with the French Revolution, the principle lines of conflict were between nations rather than princes.

This 19th century pattern lasted, he says, until the end of W.W.I, when, as a result of the Russian revolution and the reaction against it, the conflict of nations yielded to the conflict of ideologies: communism, fascism and liberal democracy. During the Cold War, Huntington says, "this conflict became embodied in the struggle between the two superpowers, neither of which was a nation state in the classical European sense and each of which defined its identity in terms of ideology."

With the end of the cold war, he says, "international politics moves out of its Western phase, and its centerpiece becomes the interaction between the West and non-Western civilizations and among non-Western civilizations." Under these conditions, "the peoples and governments of non-Western civilizations no longer remain the objects of history as targets of Western colonialism but join the West as movers and shapers of history."

Simply stated, Huntington says that the "most important conflicts of the future will occur along the cultural fault lines" between eight "civilization groups:" Western, Confucian, Japanese, Islamic, Hindu, Slavic-Orthodox, Latin American, and African. He notes that, among other things, these civilizations have different views on the "relations between God and man, the individual and the group, the citizen and the state, parents and children, husband and wife, as well as differing views of the relative importance of rights and responsibilities, liberty and authority, equality and hierarchy."

These differences "do not necessarily mean conflict and conflict does not necessarily mean violence," Huntington says. But, "differences in culture and religion create differences over policy issues, ranging from human rights to immigration to trade and commerce to the

environment . . . Most important, the efforts of the West to promote its values of democracy and liberalism as universal values, to maintain its military predominance and to advance its economic interests engender countering responses from other civilizations. Decreasingly able to mobilize support and form coalitions on the basis of ideology, governments and groups will increasingly attempt to mobilize support by appealing to common religion and civilization identity."

Space does not permit a comprehensive review of Huntington's extensive and elegant thesis, or of all of its ramifications. But regarding the narrow issue of a military and economic threat to the geopolitical comfort currently enjoyed by the United States, he argues that "the central focus of conflict for the immediate future" will come from "several Islamic-Confucian states." These states, he notes, are finding common ground in their antagonism toward what they see as Western cultural imperialism and are uniting to "challenge Western interests, values and power."

"With the Cold War over," Huntington argues, "the underlying differences between China and the United States have reasserted themselves in areas such as human rights, trade and weapons proliferation." He predicts that "these differences are unlikely to moderate," citing Deng Xiaoping's assertion in 1991 that a "new cold war" is under way between China and America.

He argues that "common culture . . . is clearly facilitating the rapid expansion of the economic relations between the People's Republic of China and Hong King, Taiwan, Singapore and the overseas Chinese communities in other Asian countries." Thus, he says, "the principal East Asian economic bloc of the future is likely to be centered on China," rather than Japan.

He notes that China's push for cultural and military hegemony over East Asia is evident from its outstanding territorial disputes with most of its neighbors and the "sustained expansion" of its military power and the means to create military power. He puts it this way.

Buoyed by spectacular economic development, China is rapidly increasing its military spending and vigorously moving forward with the modernization of its armed forces. It is purchasing weapons from the former Soviet states; it is developing long-range missiles; in 1992 it tested a one-megaton nuclear device. It is developing power-projection capabilities, acquiring aerial refueling technology, and trying to purchase an aircraft carrier. Its military buildup and assertion of sovereignty over the South China Sea are provoking a multilateral regional arms race in East Asia. China is also a major exporter of arms and weapons technology. It has exported materials to Libya and Iraq that could be used to manufacture nuclear weapons and nerve gas. It has helped Algeria build a reactor suitable for nuclear weapons research and production. China has sold to Iran nuclear technology that American officials believe could only be used to create weapons and apparently has shipped components of 300-mile-range missiles to Pakistan. North Korea has had a nuclear weapons program under way for some while and has sold advanced missiles and missile technology to Syria and Iran. The flow of weapons and weapons technology is generally from East Asia to the Middle East. There is, however, some movement in the reverse direction; China has received Stinger missiles from Pakistan . . . A new form of arms competition is thus occurring between Islamic-Confucian states and the West.

It is equally evident, Huntington says, that there will be continued problems ahead between the West and Islam. He quotes M. J. Akbar, an Indian Muslim author as noting that the West's "next confrontation is definitely going to come from the Muslim world. It is in the sweep of the Islamic nations from the Maghreb to Pakistan that the struggle for a new world order will begin." As with China, Huntington notes numerous disturbing examples of Islam's clash with its neighbors as evidence of the upcoming time of troubles.

o The spectacular population growth in Arab countries, particularly in North Africa, he notes, has led to increased migration to Western Europe, and because of this, in Italy, France and Germany particularly, "racism is increasingly open, and political reactions and violence against Arab and Turkish migrants have become more intense and more widespread."

o Islam's conflict to the South is "reflected in the on-going civil war in the Sudan between Arabs and blacks, the fighting in Chad between Libyan-supported insurgents and the government, the tensions between Orthodox Christians and Muslims in the Horn of Africa, and the political conflicts, recurring riots and communal violence between Muslims and Christians in Nigeria."

o "On the northern border of Islam, conflict has increasingly erupted between Orthodox and Muslim peoples, including the carnage of Bosnia and Sarajevo, the simmering violence between Serb and Albanian, the tenuous relations between Bulgarians and their Turkish minority, the violence between Ossetians and Ingush, the unremitting slaughter of each other by Armenians and Azeris, the tense relations between Russians and Muslims in Central Asia, and the deployment of Russian troops to protect Russian interests in the Caucasus and Central Asia."

o Finally, "the historic clash between Muslim and Hindu in the subcontinent manifests itself now not only in the rivalry between Pakistan and India but also in intensifying religious strife within India between increasingly militant Hindu groups and India's substantial Muslim minority." Islam, Huntington observes, "has bloody borders."

He acknowledges that the Islamic states are torn by internal conflict. But he argues that there is nevertheless widespread agreement among a growing population in each Islamic country that the real enemy of Islam is "the West." He notes that while only a few Muslim governments overtly supported Saddam Hussein, "many Arab elites privately cheered him on, and he was highly popular among large sections of the Arab public."

In short, Huntington says that at the heart of the coming conflict is a West that is in effect using international institutions, military power and economic resources to run the world in ways that will maintain Western predominance, protect Western interests and promote Western political and economic values. On the other side is a Confucian-Islamic world that has vastly different views toward Western ideas of individualism, the rule of law, liberalism, constitutionalism, equality, human rights, liberty, democracy, free markets, and the separation of church and state.

Endemic to this dispute are serious disagreements over arms policy; with the United States leading an effort to "prevent the development by non-Western societies of military capabilities that could threaten Western interests," and large portions of the non-West who are asserting "their right to acquire and to deploy whatever weapons they think necessary."

Relative to this point, Huntington states that the "conflict between the West and the Confucian-Islamic states, focuses largely, although not exclusively, on nuclear, chemical and biological weapons, ballistic missiles and other sophisticated means for delivering them, and the guidance, intelligence and other electronic capability for achieving that goal." Many non-Western nations, he says, "have absorbed, to the full, the truth of the response of the Indian defense minister when asked what lesson he learned from the Gulf War: 'Don't fight the United States unless you have nuclear weapons.'"

In case you're wondering, Huntington is more optimistic about Russia. He places that nation in a group that he calls the "torn countries;" i.e., those with "large numbers of peoples of different civilizations" or those which "have a fair degree of cultural homogeneity but are divided over whether their society belongs to one civilization or another." The leaders of the nations in this group, which Huntington says includes Yugoslavia, Turkey and Mexico, "typically wish to pursue a bandwagoning strategy and to make their countries members of the West, but the history, culture and traditions of their countries are non-Western."

Huntington appears hopeful that those in Russia who advocate aligning their nation with Western principles and goals will eventually win the on-going political/cultural struggle. But, always a realist, Huntington cautions that "if Russians stop behaving like Marxists, they reject liberal democracy and begin behaving like Russians but not like Westerners, the relations between Russia and the West could again become distant and conflictual."

I will close this week with a quote from Winston Churchill, which I found in an article about national defense by Johns Hopkins University professor Eliot Cohen, in the November, 1994 issue of *Commentary*. It beautifully supports the thesis that the "the good times can't last forever," and in doing so, it provides ample reason for watching the horizon for threats.

Certain it is that while men are gathering knowledge and power with ever-increasing and measureless speed, their virtues and their wisdom have not shown any notable improvements as the centuries have rolled. The brain of a modern man does not differ in essentials from that of the human beings who fought and loved here millions of years ago. The nature of man has remained hitherto practically unchanged. Under sufficient stress--starvation, terror, warlike passion, or even cold intellectual frenzy, the modern man we know so well will do the most terrible deeds. . . We have the spectacle of the powers and weapons of man far outstripping the march of his intelligence; we have the march of his intelligence proceeding far more rapidly than the development of his nobility. We may find ourselves in the presence of the strength of civilization without its mercy.

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