

The Clash of Civilizations? A Critique

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Abstract:

After the disintegration of former Soviet Union in 1989, debate started among the intellectuals as well as policy makers in USA about the future shape of world politics and role of the US in it. In this regard, early voice was Francis Fukuyama's "The End of History" which focused on political ideologies as the main unit of analysis. To him, after the end of cold war, western liberal democracy has emerged as the final form of government.

While participating in this debate, Samuel P. Huntington wrote his renowned article "The Clash of Civilizations?" in Foreign Affairs in 1993. Huntington gave an alternative interpretation about the future shape of world politics in the post- cold war era. He took difference in civilization as one of the important sources of conflicts in the world.

In this article three important issues regarding Huntington's "The Clash of Civilizations? have been addressed. These issues include conceptual strengths of Huntington's thesis "The Clash of Civilizations?" ; academic strengths and weak points in "The Clash of Civilizations?". Huntington's "The Clash of Civilizations?" has also been analysed in this context of emerging contemporary international political system.

To conclude, Huntington's "The Clash of Civilizations?" was an alternative interpretation of the possible emergence of international political system. It was a response to liberals among US policy circles who were viewing liberal democracy as final form of government. While taking civilization as unit of analysis, Huntington attempted to explain emerging structure of international politics and American role in it. However, Huntington is futuristic in his approach.

I. Introduction

After 1989, the world entered into post cold war era. The strategy of containment which dominated US foreign policy for over forty years has become obsolete. Quite a number of scholars, experts, politicians and intellectuals undertook intellectual efforts to explain the future shape of world politics as well as patterns in international relations. Early voice in this regard was Francis Fukuyama's "The End of History" which focused on political ideologies as the main unit of analysis. But, the most important and influential one was "The Clash of Civilizations?" presented by Samuel. P. Huntington. Huntington's article, published in Foreign Affairs in 1993, stirred a lot of debate around the world.

The objective of this article is to critically review Huntington's "The Clash of Civilizations?". The article will focus on three questions. Firstly, we will examine the conceptual strengths of Huntington's thesis "The Clash of Civilizations?". Secondly, what are the academic strengths and weaknesses in "The Clash of Civilizations?"

Thirdly, does “the Clash of Civilizations?” fulfill the realities of contemporary international political system?

II. Conceptualization of the Clash of Civilizations

The cold war divided the world into the first, second and third world. These divisions are no more relevant. It is more meaningful to divide the world on the basis of culture and civilization instead of making groups of countries in terms of ideological or economic systems. According to Huntington, civilization is the highest cultural grouping of people and the broadest level of cultural identity which distinguishes humans from others species. It is identified by common objective elements such as language, history, religion, customs, institution as well as subjective element such as self-identification of people(Huntington,1993). While identifying Western, Confucian, Japanese, Islamic, Hindu, Slavic-Orthodox, Latin American and African civilizations as major civilizations, Huntington has foreseen the future course of world politics dominated by conflicts between these civilizations along the cultural fault-lines.

Huntington has enumerated following factors as causes of the clash of civilizations. First, differences among civilizations are basic because civilizations are differentiated from each other by history, language, culture, tradition and religion. Second, the world is becoming a smaller place. Due to increasing interactions between people of various civilizations, civilizations consciousness is being intensified. Third, processes of economic modernization and social change are separating people from their local identities. Fourth, the dual role of the west has enhanced the growth of civilization consciousness. On the one hand, the west is at a peak of power. At the similar time, perhaps as a reaction to it, attraction towards its roots is increasing among non-western civilizations. Fifth, cultural differences are less compromised and resolved than political and economic ones. Lastly, growing economic regionalism has two fold impacts. On the one hand, successful economic regionalism will enhance civilization – consciousness while on the other hand economic regionalism may succeed only when it has its foundation in common civilization.

Huntington predicts that in future the West will have a conflict with Islam. While quoting an Indian Muslim author, M.J. Akbar’s Observation, he states 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 *Maghrib* to Pakistan that the struggles for a new world order will begin(Huntington,1993).

States belonging to one civilization, when involve in war with people from different civilizations, try to gather up support from other members of their own civilization on the basis of civilization commonality, what H.D.S. Greenway has termed the “kin-country” syndrome. To Huntington, this “kin-country syndrome is replacing political ideology and traditional balance of power as the basis for cooperation and Coalitions(Huntington,1993). He has presented Gulf war, Armenian- Azerbaijan conflict and fighting in former Yugoslavia as examples of “kin-country” syndrome.

According to Huntington, non-western countries including Latin American, East European, Orthodox countries of the former Soviet Union, Muslim, Confucian, Hindu and Buddhist Societies do not want to join the west due to cultural differences. However, intensity may vary from East European countries to Buddhist societies. These non-

western countries want to compete the west by promoting their internal development and by cooperating with other non-western countries. The most prominent form of this cooperation is the Confucian- Islamic connection that has emerged to challenge western interests, values and Power(Huntington,1993).

Huntington's "the clash of civilizations?" provides implications for the west. As a short term advantage it emphasizes upon the west to promote greater cooperation within its own civilization particularly between its North American and European segments so that escalation of local inter-civilization conflict into major inter-civilization war could be prevented.

In the long term, some other measures have been recommended for western policy. Non-western civilizations have attempted to become modern without becoming western. These civilizations will continue this posture by acquiring the wealth, technology, skills, machines and weapons that are part of modernity. However, they will attempt to reconcile this modernity with their traditional values and culture. Therefore, their economic as well as military power will increase. Hence, the west will have to accommodate these non western modern civilizations. However, the west will have to maintain its economic and military power necessary to protect its interests.

III. Academic Weak Points

"The Clash of Civilizations" has it weakness in three methodological dimensions, discipline, approach and correlative propositions. Discipline-wise, "The Clash of Civilizations" delineates a confusional mode of analysis(Sajjadpour,1995). A reader remains in a permanent state of confusion because of two reasons. First, Huntington refrains from clearly drawing his choice of discipline in the article. Second, he borrows concepts form different disciplines and fits his conclusion. The concept of civilization is vividly borrowed from Anthropology, identity from Social Psychology, and conflict form Political Science.

Approach-wise, the article has two weaknesses. The first one is confusion in dealing with realist theory of international relations. Huntington's aim is to produce a piece of international politics but he is inconsistent with the realist approach when he deals with world power politics. However, he does not stay in this line of thought when he identifies civilizational affinity as the base for alliances rather than national interest.

The second deficiency with respect to approach in Huntington's article relates to the unmanageability to its unit of analysis. Civilization as a unit of analysis is a big entity. Here two conceptual difficulties need to be mentioned. The first one is the definition of civilization. Huntington is not successful in defining civilization with universal application. The second conceptual deficiency in the definition of civilization can be identified with the locational element of civilization. Geographical boundaries are so significant in his definition that it may not be applicable to the Islamic civilization because it is not boundary limited due to the nature of Islam as a universal religion. Muslim communities in western countries are growing. Do they belong to the western civilization or the Islamic one?

The third methodological weak point needs to be examined the correlative propositions. The key point in his analysis is that the future conflicts are

keenly correlated with civilizational differences. Thus, correlation is drawn from the case studies: Bosnia, the Persian Gulf and Nagorno–Karabakh. These cases are different in their locality, nature, the number of players and the background of the conflicts. In each of these case studies natural national interest can be identified as the cause of the conflict. Another weak point in Huntington's article is what Edward W. Said, calls affirmation of the personification of enormous entities called "the west" and "Islam" (Said,1994). Huntington has not explained internal dynamics and plurality of every civilization because the major contest in most modern cultures concerns the definition or interpretation of each culture(Said,1994).

"The Clash of Civilizations" and Contemporary International Political System

Huntington's article in my view is not in coherence with realities of contemporary politics. Huntington wrote:

"What ultimately counts for people is not political ideology or economic interest. Faith and family, blood and belief, are what people identify with and what they will fight and die for. And that is why the clash of civilizations is replacing the cold war as the Central Phenomenon of global politics, and why a civilizational paradigm provides, better than any alternative, a useful starting point for understanding and coping with the changes going on in the world"(Huntington,1993).

We all know that one of the most striking phenomena in the post–cold war global politics is the economy which has become the dominant factor in shaping international relations. States consider their economies the basic factor in international political system. So, states try their best to grow their economies to play a key role in global politics. How could it be conceived that "what ultimately counts for people is noteconomic interest?"(Junhui,1995).

A Chinese Scholar, Jin Junhui has presented his view point in his article "The Clash of civilizations: observations" in these words:

"In today's world, owing to the different levels of economic developments, the existence of significant distinction between the developed countries and the developing countries is an objective fact. In order to realize their own economic growth, the developing countries have been fighting in their efforts to establish a new world economic order with certain developed countries. So, how could it be arbitrarily asserted that to group countries in terms of their culture and civilization is far more meaningful?"(Junhui,1995).

Huntington's thesis does not accord with the reality of the present world. The changes are still going on in post-cold war international system. Regional groupings are the preferences of the states. Regional organizations such as European Union, ASEAN, OAU and SAARC are playing an important role in world politics. World is in transitional phase after cold war. There are various factors that may give rise to real conflicts. These factors include territorial disputes, ethnic clashes, racial and religious contradictions, differences between civilizations, hegemony and values. It is not yet the right time to define which single factor or combination of factors has become dominant.

People must pay attention to the fact that Huntington in his article. "The Clash of civilizations" explicitly offered the following policy proposals:

"In the short term it is clearly in the interest of the west to promote greater cooperation and unity within its own civilization, particularly between its European and North American components to incorporate societies in Eastern Europe and Latin America whose culture are close to those of the west" to promote and maintain cooperative relations with Russia and Japan, to prevent escalation of local inter-civilization conflicts into major inter-civilization wars, to limit the expansion of the military strength of Confucian and Islamic states, to strengthen international institutions that reflect and legitimate Western interests and values and to promote the involvements of non – western states in those institutions.."(Huntington,1993).

From the above quotation, one can easily see that these proposals are nothing but an attempt to create or intensify conflicts in the world with the label of "The Clash of Civilizations" and even to spare no efforts in creating new "cold war" among nations in order to establish and strengthen the dominant position of the western civilization in the whole world.

It is notable that some observers keep on cogitate the sinister activities of the military industrial complex, with lobbies for the US armaments industry diligently promoting the idea of defending enemies (Hyman,1995). Scholars speculate that "the Clash of civilizations" is written for the U.S lobbies who want to sale US made weapons. They have succeeded in their purpose threatening the world in general and the west in particular against Islamic-Confucian civilizational cooperation.

Professor Huntington has endeavored to establish connection between Islam and Confucianism as two civilizations. From his point of view, selling of arms to Islamic countries is the reason behind this connection. If it is correct, how the arms relation between the United States and Saudi Arabia and Kuwait could be judged"(Serajzah, 1995).

As far as Islamic civilization is concerned, Professor Huntington's view is not correct regarding application of definition of civilization to the whole Islamic world. The East Asian Islamic countries like Indonesia, Malaysia and Brunei; Iran and Arab Countries; Muslims of Central Asian region and Muslims of the sub-continent have grown up in their own historical and cultural beds. Therefore, they have different views on global issues.

Professor Huntington has laid one sided emphasis on conflicts and contradictions among different civilizations with the neglect of their co existence and blend. Diverse civilizations not only have their contradictions but also have their co-existence and blend. The four great inventions from ancient China, the symbols of Chinese Civilizations have now become the common wealth of the whole human civilizations on a more developed basis. The great masters of the Enlightenment in Europe in the 17th 18th centuries had more or less learned from Chinese Civilization while the Chinese Civilization including Confucianism, in the process of development, has learned a lot from other civilizations including Islamic civilization(Yuxi,1995).

IV. Conclusion

Huntington's article "the Clash of Civilizations?" is an attempt to explain future patterns of world politics after the disintegration of Soviet Union and particularly American role in it. It is an explanation about new phase in world politics after the end of cold war. Huntington's article was a response to Francis Fukuyama's thesis of "End of

History" in which Fukuyama focused on political ideologies as the main unit of analysis and argued that liberal democracy might embody the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the final form of government.(Fukuyama,1989).While presenting " The Clash of Civilizations?" Huntington gave alternative interpretation in American policy – making ranks for possible future shape of world politics in the post –Cold War era.

Huntington's thesis on "The Clash of Civilizations?" is bold academic flirtation with the concept called civilization. Presenting civilizations as a unit of analysis, Huntington has attempted to identify the differences in civilization as one of the important sources of the conflicts in the world. In this regard he is futuristic in his approach. Though he relies heavily on an article written by the veteran Orientalist Bernard Lewis in 1990, titled as "the Roods of Muslim Rage" yet his argument is visionary (Said, 1994).

Huntington's article was an academic reply to liberals who after the end of Cold War politics were of the view that western values had become the only remaining ideological alternative for nations in the post –Cold War World. According to Huntington, nation states will remain the most powerful actors in world affairs (Huntington, 1993).

There are some brilliant points and analyses in Huntington's article. For example, he rightly points out that in the politics of civilizations, the people and governments of non-western civilizations will no longer remain the objects of history as targets of western colonialism but join the west as movers and shapers of history (Huntington, 1993).

After September 11, 2001, international community has witnessed a lot of debates about Huntington's thesis regarding possible clash between Islam and the West. Muslim world especially has not liked Huntington's thesis that a confrontation is on the horizon between the West and Islam (Mazuri, 2006).

Though Huntington has presented a notion what he called "civilization identity" yet he has argued for "co-existence of Civilization" when he rightly says that "there will be no universal Civilization, but instead of a world of different civilization, each of which will have to learn to co- exist with others"(Huntington, 1993).

Now, it is the time for intellectuals both western and Muslims to explain the notions in such a way that harmonious atmosphere could be created in the world. To conclude, it can be stated that dispute some academic weak points, Huntington's article "the Clash of Civilization?" has presented some brilliant points for analyses. His article has started unending debate and attracted surprise amount of attention and reaction.

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