Alliance of Civilizations: The global peace project of the 21st century

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Abstract: The Alliance of Civilizations was established in 2005, at the initiative of the Governments of Spain and Turkey; under the auspices of the United Nations for inter civilizations dialogue to bridge the gap between the West and Muslim world. This article analyzes advantage and disadvantage sides of the success of this initiative.

Key words: *Peace, civilizations, alliance, clash, East, West.*

1. Introduction

The clash of civilizations is a theory, proposed by a well-known political scientist Samuel P. Huntington.[1] It states that people's cultural and religious identities will be the primary source of conflict in the post-Cold War world. Thus, the September 11, 2001 attacks and subsequent events including the Afghanistan and Iraq occupation by U.S.A led people to believe that this clash would shape the future of the Western-Islamic world and govern international relations accordingly.

Three projects have been presented as alternatives to the theory "clash of civilizations" by three Muslim countries. The theories and countries are: "Islam Hadari", Malaysia; "Enlightened Moderation", Pakistan; and "Alliance of Civilizations", Turkey.[2] They have been proposed in order to highlight importance of inter-civilizations dialogue rather than clash of civilizations. Among these projects, Alliance of Civilizations was the most celebrated internationally.

The Secretary-General of the United Nations launched an initiative to support it and it was co-sponsored by the Prime Ministers of Spain and Turkey in November 2005. Turkey underlined the necessity to develop a paradigm based on mutual respect among different cultures and to set up a comprehensive international coalition to maintain relations between communities and states.

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[1] The theory of "the clash of civilizations" was formulated in 1993 in a Foreign Affairs article by Samuel Huntington. He later expanded his thesis in a book, The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order, 1996. The term itself was used before him by Bernard Lewis, in an article in the September 1990 issue of The Atlantic Monthly titled The Roots of Muslim Rage immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The syntagma "clash of civilizations" actually was first used at least more than seventy years ago. Basil Matthews uses the phrase in the very title of his book, "Young Islam on Trek: A Study in the Clash of Civilizations", published in London in 1926. The publisher of this book was the Church Missionary Society of London. Huntington obviously took the title from Basil Matthews. However, it is particularly significant that in all these theories of the "clash of civilizations", it is Islam that is regarded as the enemy, as the other side, as opposite, as an antithesis. See, Karic, Enes. (2003) Philosophical Dialogue of the Religions, instead of Clash of Civilizations, in the Process of Globalizations, from an Islamic Perspective. Philosophy Bridging the World Religions. Edited By Peter Koslowski, P. 170, Bulliet, Richard W. (2004) The Case For Islamo-Chiristian Civilization. New York: Columbia University Press, p. 2.

[2] Actually, the initiative first has been taken by Spain Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero after Madrid train bombings (also known as 3/11 and in Spanish as 11-M), on the morning of March 11, 2004 (three days before Spain's general elections), killing 191 people and wounding 1,800. Zapatero suggested Turkey to co-sponsor it for being Muslim culturally and Western politically. Later Turkey has taken leading role in developing the project. See. Balcı, Ali. Medeniyetler İttifakı: Problemler, açmazlar, hayaller.

According to Alliance project, lack of dialogue was the major reason behind today's global problems. It is simply an invitation to everyone to reject the clash of civilizations, and to accept the alliance of civilizations. Turkey considers the Alliance of Civilizations as the global peace project of the 21st century.

2. Why Turkey and Spain?

The Alliance of Civilizations initiative was co-chaired by the Prime Ministers of Spain and Turkey. The question, "Why Spain and Turkey for this initiative?" is important.

First of all, Spain was home to what the medieval Spanish scholars called "convivencia", the multicultural and multi-religious co-existence of Muslims, Christians and Jews in Andalusia. Spain also witnessed the tragic end of this remarkable experience. With the end of convivencia and Muslim presence in Southern Europe, a historic opportunity was lost.

Secondly, Spain went through a violent civil war and a period of dictatorship in the 20th century. After a long struggle to overcome the seemingly irreconcilable ethnic, religious and political divisions in the Spanish society, it has succeeded in establishing social consensus and a lasting democracy. Despite the sad memory of the reconquista and the end of convivencia, Spain was able to foster a new culture of reconciliation and negotiation in the last part of the 20th century. The Spanish culture of compromise and reconciliation became so strong that the 2004 Madrid train bombings did not damage its resolve.[3] Even in its modern history, Spain has an Islamic influences and the common Mediterranean culture shared by Spain, Turkey and other Muslim countries.

On the other hand, Turkish Islamic culture represents Muslims at large. That is because Turkey in spite of its secular regime has legacy of Ottoman State on its shoulders. This legacy inevitably brings responsibility for the common cause of Muslims.

It can be seen at a glance that this initiative is also in line with Turkish foreign policy. Since the Justice and Development Party (AK Parti) came to power in the late 2002, Turkey has been following a "zero problems with neighbors" policy. This simply means a soft and considerable Turkish influence in formerly Ottoman territories.

Before Ak Parti, Turkish foreign policy had been unbalanced, with an overemphasis on ties with Western Europe and the United States to the neglect of Turkey's interests with other countries, particularly in the Middle East. Some call this new strategy as "neo-Ottomanism" at peace with the multiethnic and cosmopolitan nature of the state. According to this, Turkey should play a very active diplomatic, political and economic role in a wide region of which it is the "center".[4]

The policy of zero problems with neighbors brought Turkey to the forefront of regional politics, as a constructive element. This cooperation and peace-oriented regional policy, indeed, has increased Turkey's political and economic weight in the region. Turkey thus emerged in the Balkans, the Caucasus, and the Middle East regions as one of the key player for regional peace and stability.

In fact, if Turkey can play a crucial role for regional peace and stability that means it can also play the same role for global peace and stability. Being open to the West and East, Turkey undoubtedly can contribute a lot for global peace.

It is also important to mention here that, Turkey is a candidate for full membership in the European Union

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Anlayış Dergisi, May, 2009, v. 72.

[3] Bülbül, Kudret and Özipek, Bekir Berat, (2007) A Collective Initiative for Universal Peace. Ankara: SETA, pp. 41-42.

[4] Taşpınar, Ömer. "Neo-Ottomanism and Kemalist foreign policy", Today's Zaman.
Retrieved September 22, 2008 from http://www.todayszaman.com/tz-web/yazarDetay.do?haberno=153882.

with its Islamic identity. Many believe that its full membership will bring reconciliation between Islam, the modern world and thus Muslims can coexist with Europeans in peace and harmony. Since EU membership is a long-term strategic objective for Turkey, it should do its utmost to build bridges between East and West communities.

For historical and present situations of the two countries, both Spain and Turkey are suitable for taking leadership in this initiative. The peace instead of the conflict between two worlds is also at interest of both countries.

3. Framework of Alliance of Civilizations

The aim of the Alliance of Civilizations is made public by its official website as follows:

The Alliance of Civilizations has a specific mandate and it is important to clarify its purpose and the scope of its activities. Being a UN initiative, the Alliance of Civilizations has a global scope underpinned by a universal perspective, while placing a priority on addressing relations between western and Muslim societies.

At the political level, mainly through the High Representative's role, the Alliance of Civilizations aims to facilitate the establishment of contacts and dialogues with political, religious, media and civil society personalities who would be prepared to exert their influence in advancing the Alliance of Civilization's objectives. The Alliance does not intend to create a "third way" or a shortcut into ongoing negotiating processes in a range of political arenas. Nor does it intend to duplicate or to parallel existing political channels. In other words, the Alliance will not operate at the level of political decision making processes themselves, but will act upstream and downstream, in order to help develop the conditions for greater knowledge and understanding among decision makers coming from different cultural and religious backgrounds and to mobilize groups that can act as forces of moderation. In this context, and in line with the recommendations of the High-level Group's Report, the High Representative may advance specific political initiatives as circumstances require.

In terms of programmatic activities, the Alliance seeks to promote, maintain and strengthen collaborative relations and information sharing with related initiatives, particularly those within the United Nations system whose interaction and coordination should be reinforced, such as the Dialogue among Civilizations and the Tripartite Forum on International Cooperation for Peace. Indeed, the primary focus of the Alliance will be to develop partnerships with states, international and regional organizations, civil society groups and private sector bodies that share the vision, mission and objectives of the Alliance. The Alliance does not aim to replace any initiative, programme or project already being carried out by UN agencies, member states, intergovernmental agencies, foundations, corporations, or civil society organizations. Nor is the Alliance intended to compete with them. In this regard, special attention should be given to those UN agencies whose work is relevant to the Alliance. In those cases where the High Representative, after careful consideration, deems it appropriate and necessary for the Alliance of Civilizations to develop a new project in order to advance its goals and objectives, the Alliance will seek to do so in partnership with other relevant agencies and organizations. However, the Alliance does not seek, as its primary function, to take on the full development of projects on the ground, nor is it designed to run its own set of programmes. Rather, the Alliance will seek first to assist in the adaptation and expansion of existing efforts.

Working with partners presents opportunities as well as challenges. The challenges involve working cooperatively towards a common goal, without forsaking the independence, mandates, and priorities of individual

partners. The opportunities entail learning from one another and evolving accordingly. Such partnerships seek to produce a multiplier effect by advancing better coordination between projects, capitalizing on the comparative advantages of each partner, and generating greater visibility based on the sharing of common goals. The commitment of partners should be threefold: To act toward the benefit of all; to encourage effective collaborative action; and to develop a vision for the future.

Regarding the United Nations system, the Alliance will take full advantage of its nature and its small and flexible structure. It will be based on a programmatic and result-oriented approach.

The Alliance is still in its early stages. The forthcoming months will be mainly devoted to the development of effective governance for the Alliance, resource mobilization, partnership building, implementation of internal and external information and communication mechanisms, as well as advocacy in order to promote the Alliance.

The following implementation plan is divided in two parts.

Part 1 describes the strategic and structural framework of the implementation plan. It provides an overview of the defining principles of the Alliance of Civilizations and outlines the structure that will support the work of the Alliance, including mechanism for partnership building, advocacy, financing and priority setting. It draws directly from the recommendations made in the Alliance high-level group report, focusing, in particular, on four main fields of action: youth, media, education and migration. It also reflects the High Representative's vision of the way the Alliance should advance in its endeavors and of its own role.

Part 2 outlines the Alliance's Programme of Action for the years 2007-2009. Following the Annual Alliance of Civilizations Forum, a mid-term review of the programme will be carried out to assess the progress achieved, identify obstacles and constraints encountered, develop solutions to overcome them, and devise ways of further redefining and updating the Programme.[5]

4. Final report of the high-level group[6]

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[5] Retrieved January 18, 2010 from http://www.unaoc.org/repository/implementation_plan.pdf.

[6] The high-level group members:
Co-chairs
Prof. Federico mayor (Spain) President of the Culture of Peace Foundation and Former Director General of UNESCO.
Prof. Mehmet Aydin (Turkey) Minister of Turkish State.
Middle east
Hojjatoleslam Seyyed Mohammad Khatami (Former President of Iran)
Sheikha Mozah Bint Nasser Al Missned (Chairperson, Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development, Qatar)
North Africa
Dr. Mohamed Charfi (Former Education Minister of Tunisia, Tunisia)
Dr. Ismail Serageldin (President, Bibliotheca Alexandrina, Egypt)
Mr. André Azoulay (Adviser to King Mohammed VI of Morocco)
West Africa
Mr. Moustapha Niasse (Former Prime Minister of Senegal)
South Africa
Archbishop Desmond Tutu (The Rt. Hon. Archbishop of Cape Town, South Africa)
West Europe
Hubert Védrine (Former Minister of Foreign Affairs, France)
Karen Armstrong (Historian of Religion, United Kingdom)
East Europe
Prof. Vitaly Naumkin (President of the International Center for Strategic and Political Studies and Chair, Moscow State University, Russian Federation)
North America
Prof. John Esposito (Founding Director, Prince Al-Waleed bin-Talal Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding 'Georgetown

The high-level group of the Alliance of Civilizations was formed by former Secretary-General Kofi Annan, comprised of 20 world-renowned individuals, to explore the roots of polarization between societies and cultures today and to recommend a practical programme of action to address this issue. The group prepared a report which provides an analysis and puts forward practical recommendations that form the basis for the implementation phase of the Alliance of Civilizations after completing its anticipated work that was co-chaired by the Minister of State of Turkey Professor Mehmet Aydın and former Director-General UNESCO Professor Federico Mayor.

The report includes tangible proposals for the establishment of a network of relations among distinct civilizations through dialogue which would be based on mutual respect, understanding and tolerance. The report was presented to Mr. Kofi Annan, the Secretary-General of the UN then, through a ceremony held on November 13, 2006 in Istanbul, following the last meeting of the high-level group.

From the report, I would like to highlight important topics held by the high-level group under the title "guiding principles" briefly in order to guide this initiative.

(1) An Alliance of Civilizations must by nature be based on a multi-polar perspective;

(2) An increasingly interdependent and globalized world can be regulated only through the rule of law and an effective multilateral system, with the United Nations system at its core;

(3) A full and consistent adherence to human right standards forms the foundation for stable societies and peaceful international relations;

(4) Diversity of civilizations and cultures is a basic feature of human society and a driving force of human progress;

(5) Terrorism can never be justified;

(6) Poverty, democracy and religion are the other important topics addressed by the high-level group.

High-level group put general policy recommendations towards an Alliance of Civilizations in the report.

The Middle East conflicts have been given priority for achieving the initiative. With regard to relations between Muslims and Western societies, it is acknowledged that the contemporary realities which shape the views of millions of Muslims: the prolonged Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the violence in Afghanistan, and the violent conflict in Iraq.

Among the Middle East conflicts, Palestinian issue is declared that it is the major factor in the widening rift between Muslims and western societies. For achieving a just and sustainable solution to this conflict a courageous and a bold vision are required on the part of Israelis, Palestinians and all countries capable of influencing the situation.

Therefore a re-invigorated multilateral peace process as a further step in a renewed effort to solve the

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Rabbi Arthur Schneier (President, Appeal of Conscience Foundation and Senior Rabbi, East Park Synagogue, United States)
Latin America
Enrique Iglesias (Secretary-General, Ibero-American Organization and Former President, Inter-American Development Bank, Uruguay)
Prof. Candido Mendes (Secretary-General, Académie de la Latinité, Brazil)
South Asia
Dr. Nafis Sadik (Special Adviser to the UN Secretary-General, Pakistan)
Shobana Bhartia (Member of Parliament, India;Vice Chairperson and Editorial Director, *The Hindustan Times*, New Delhi)
Southeast Asia
Ali Alatas (Former Foreign Minister of Indonesia)
East Asia
Prof. Pan Guang (Director and Professor, Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, China)

problems that lie at the heart of the Middle East crisis is proposed by the high-level group including the convening, of an international conference on the Middle East peace process, to be attended by all relevant actors, with the aim of reaching a comprehensive peace agreement.

Another recommendation is "political pluralism in Muslim countries". It is stated that one of the factors contributing to the polarization between Muslims and western societies and to the rise in extremism in these relations is the repression of political movements in the Muslim world. Therefore, it is in the interest of Muslim and western societies alike that ruling parties in the Muslim world provide the space for the full participation of non-violent political parties, whether religious or secular in nature. Foreign governments have been suggested to be consistent in their support for democratic processes and not interfere when the results do not fit their political agenda. This call for expanded political pluralism applies not only to countries in the Middle East or in the larger Muslim world, but to all nations.

The report under the title "Other General Policy Recommendations" addressed coming issues:

A renewed commitment to multilateralism, a full and consistent respect for international law and human rights, coordinated migration policies consistent with human rights standards, combating poverty and economic inequities, protection of the freedom of worship, exercising responsible leadership, the central importance of civil society activism, and establishing partnerships to advance an Alliance of Civilizations.

For establishing partnerships to advance an Alliance of Civilizations, the high-level group recommends the development of partnerships in the framework of the Alliance of Civilizations with international organizations that share its goals, and the reinforcement of their interaction and coordination with the UN system. The report said that special attention should be given to those international organizations that are part of the UN family and those organizations that have already been cooperating with the high-level group of the Alliance of Civilizations, namely: the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the European Union, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), the League of Arab States, the Islamic Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO), United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), and the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), as well as other international and national organizations, public or private.

For the report, education, youth, migration and media policies can play a critical role in helping to reduce cross-cultural tensions and to build bridges between communities. For this reason, "Part II—Main Fields of Action and Thematic Recommendations" explores the primary means by which such action could be taken in each of these sectors to improve relations.[7]

5. Evaluation of the Alliance of Civilizations initiative

Alliance of Civilizations initiative is a big international project with big promises for the global peace in the 21st century. Some progress has also been made in the process initiated at the beginning of 2005, under the leadership of former Secretary-General Kofi Annan and later Ban Ki-moon, the new Secretary-General of the UN.

For the success of the initiative, there are of course advantage and disadvantage sides, but, it seems that initiators focus on advantage sides at large. Despite of the good intention of the initiators and progress made in the process, I have to admit that I have some reservations about the success of this project. This does not mean that

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[7] See the full version of the report of the high-level group: http://www.unaoc.org/content/view/64/94/lang,english/.

the theory "clash of civilizations" which undermines global peace must not be challenged with just and reasonable projects. But this means that the initiative must be persuasive and based on realistic foresight and realities of the ground not just on mere good intentions and intellectual discourse.

The following points are my critiques on Alliance of Civilizations initiative.

(1) First of all, according to my understanding, Alliance of Civilizations project's conceptual framework and priorities were designed according to modern worldview. Muslim civilization has to be seen from the perspective of its own concepts and categories and its priorities should be accepted within.

(2) From epistemological perspective, each civilization is built on different paradigm and worldview. Each civilization has its own goals in line with its own values and future projects to achieve. History testifies that civilizations because of being different in nature always push each other instead of attract one another. They are always in competition in term of economy, education, future plan, etc.. This does not indicate that "conflict" thesis of Bernard Lewis and Samuel Huntington, which have played a significant role in dragging West and East into a profound crisis is right. Alliance of Civilizations with this name initially accept existing of more than one civilizations, i.e., particularly Islamic and Western. This reality means that we admit different paradigms by necessity which shapes different civilizations. Here we need to ask that "how to make civilizations with different paradigm in alliance and against what?" So, those who mastermind theory of Alliance of Civilization should address this paradigmatical differences and competition among the civilizations.

(3) The success of an initiative depends upon its coherent moral and philosophical foundations as well as the way in which it is presented with a proper language and terminology. This involves a closer examination of the Alliance of Civilizations project and its nomenclature. Based on this fact, Bekir Berat Özipek and Kudret Bülbül rightly pointed out that the name of the project should be reconsidered, because the concept of "alliance" is borrowed from the war literature and usually associated with conflicts and temporary truce. In addition to this criticism, it may also be argued that the concept still remains within the limits of a discourse based on the clash of civilizations thesis.[8]

So, it is not an exaggeration to say that "alliance" was a rapid reactionary frame to "clash" thesis without deep analytic study. It is not proper to say that terminology is not important but the important issue is what you try to achieve. It is clear to me that the aim of this project is to create tolerance and dialogue between different faiths and ideologies and to demolish all walls that are barriers to understanding each other. Because of this reason, there is no consistency in concept of Alliance of Civilizations and its context.

In retrospect, history furnishes us as it repeats itself that the term "Alliance of Civilization" and such a practice did not exist in history of man as a peace or bridging concept between different cultures and nations. The concept of Alliance of Civilization is a developed version of "dialogue among civilizations"[9] proposed by former president of Iran Seyyed Mohammad Khatami which was the more proper name for this project. Muslims are in majority support the concept of dialogue among civilizations. However, this latter terminology is incomprehensible for them, because it does not generate peaceful and harmonious society in common understanding.

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[8] Bülbül, Kudret and Özipek, Bekir Berat, A Collective Initiative for Universal Peace. pp. 50-51.

[9] The theory of "the clash of civilizations" was met with dismay and concern among intellectuals and political leaders in majority Muslim countries. Significant voices were raised at that time to refute this confrontational position. President Khatami of Iran responded by proposing an alternate view, which he called "dialogue of civilizations". See, Ernst, Carl W. (2008) Demystifying the Rhetoric of Civilizational Conflict. Dialogue of Civilisations and The Construction of Peace. Edited by Thomas W. Simon and Azizan Baharuddin. Kuala Lumpur: Centre for Civilisational Dialogue University of Malaya. p. 5.

(4) The main handicap of this project is that those who support the clash of civilization theory are closely connected to American establishment and it was basically a rhetorical slogan for them in order to cover their future master plan after Cold War whose main objective was redesigning Muslim world map in line to American and Israelites interests. This project is under the umbrella of UN which is considered an American watch dog according to majority of world population included Muslims. The problem with UN is that it is subjected to super power countries particularly America. The question, "What can UN do when America and its subordinates decide a matter?" is a challenging one.

Being this project under UN will not make this project achievable if it is not supported by U.S.A, because it has been controlled monetarily and politically. Let us remember how U.S.A undermined UN during its war on Iraq. Its unilateralism has done great damage to the prestige of UN, which is not a fair organization tailored according to international sensitivities, but a tool for promoting the interests of big countries like the U.S.A. For many UN turned into meaningless constructs lacking respect. It has no binding on U.S.A.

The Alliance of Civilizations initiative actually was not supported by America during George Bush times. Its foreign policy even today such as war on terrorism, occupying Muslim countries, its desire to control energy sources and full support to Israel is clear evident. Such policies are the real factors that undermine global peace. Russia, European Union and Muslim countries at large are also silent on this project.

(5) Although US new President Barack Hussein Obama during his speech in Cairo called for a new era of cooperative relations between the West and Muslim world and hailed "Turkey's leadership in the Alliance of Civilizations",[10] it is too early to judge him. To support the project needs structural change in U.S.A policies which is not easy. It is also possible to say that the initiative will be weaken if Obama supports it. This is because the project leans on theory of the clash and its practices. When the policies based on theory of the clash disappear on the ground, it become difficult for its alternative projects to survive.

(6) Secular establishment of Turkey is not on good terms with Islamic practices. For example headscarf issue. Islamic dress-code has been a source of conflict between the state and the wider society in Turkey ever since the new republic adopted old French secularistic model in its regime. Muslim women's headscarf is thus prohibited in the universities and various official institutions. This prohibition has put the country into many crises, especially on the social, political and economic planes, with different effects on an average Turkish life. This headscarf ban and other Islamic practices raise the question that if Turkish establishment has problem with Islamic life style,[11] then how can it lead the Alliance of Civilizations initiative on the name of Islamic civilization?

(7) Development and Justice Party (AK Parti) is the ruling party in Turkey under the leadership of Tayyip Erdogan. He as Prime Minister of Turkey launches this initiative on behalf of Muslim civilization. The problem here is that, Ak Parti just recent year escaped closure on charges of being a "focal point for anti-secular activities" by the Constitutional Court. Yet, it was found guilty of becoming the focal point for anti-secular activities by 10 members of the Court out of the 11 on July 30, 2008. According to the Constitutional Court, this party will be under close observations. This constitutes a "paradox" for the initiative. Hence, coming questions undermine credibility of the project: "On behalf of whom Ak Parti takes this initiative? Is it the project of Turkish state or Ak Parti? Is it possible under this circumstance to achieve the goal of the project?"

(8) Historically speaking, Muslims have no difficulty to live with other people of different religious and

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[10] Retrieved January 18, 2010 from http://www.unaoc.org/content/view/369/73/lang,english/.
[11] See, Muslim Women in Contemporary Societies Reality and Opportunities, Chapter XII, "Headscarf Deadlock in Turkey as a Case Study" by Dr. Serdar Demirel, 2009. Kuala Lumpur: IIUM Press. pp. 283-307.

culture. Islam always concerned with peaceful co-existence with non Muslims. Muslim history is rich to show models of living together in peace and harmony with others.[12] Just to mention a few historical facts as examples to this will be sufficient. Non Muslims could preserve their identities and to live according to their belief system under the full protection of Islamic states in places like Baghdad, Jerusalem, Istanbul and Granada of Andalusia throughout history. At the present time, Malaysia is a lively reflective structure of Muslim cohabitation where every sect of religions is able to preserve its identity under the power of Muslim government. The reasons behind the problem between East and West is not religious and Muslims historical experience, but political which based on a variety of reasons such as ethnic, cultural and ideological differences; therefore, a possible solution project needs to encompass all these aspects. Unfortunately, this initiative is far away to put just and fair solutions to all these aspects. A chief problem that causes hatred among Muslims towards West in general and America in particular is their foreign policy in support of Israel versus Palestine and their desire to control Middle East. To be realistic we cannot talk about a peace, unless those super power countries change their policies toward Muslims, otherwise aim of this alliance will not be achieved. Therefore, the project must strongly address the above problems.

(9) Before Alliance of Civilizations, it is necessary to establish alliance of inter civilization among Muslims. Without having inter dialogue or a convention of Muslims embodied and represented by the whole Muslim countries, Turkey alone cannot talk on behalf of Muslims and such initiative cannot represent them. On the contrary, Turkey and Spain use this project for their own international political agenda. For instance, Turkey uses its advantage to get full membership from UN and also to be one of the key players in Muslim world. These facts jeopardize the project success.

(10) In addition to above points, majority of Muslims all over the world have no any idea about this project including Turkish people. According to a scientific survey in which the views of Turkish people on the Alliance of Civilizations have been conducted and investigated, even majority of them was unaware about the project.[13] This is despite the fact that Turkey presents this project as alternative to the theory "clash of civilizations" in order to highlight importance of inter-civilizations dialogue which is supported by United Nations and co-sponsored by the Prime Ministers of Spain and Turkey. If peoples are unaware about the project, how can they be part of the solution?

(11) Different nations interact differently with problems based on their different traditional background, interest, as well as their different approaches. There are issues which need common perspective and the same sense of responsibility in doing good things that concern all such as global peace. Diversity of Muslim nations in terms of races, languages, cultures, and ways of understanding Islam are unavoidably daunting factors. These perhaps arouse questions: "How to put together perspectives of billions of Muslims in confronting global peace and playing positive role(s) in the solution process?" Certainly, the answer to these questions can be given through the common values agreed upon by all Muslims. Vital important of this, Alliance of Civilizations lacks the common ground which should have binding nature religiously and accepted by all.

(12) The concept of Alliance of Civilization is basically formed on a few Sufi scholars' thought for the

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[12] See, Babu Sahib, Hikmatullah. (2008) Constructing Religious Tolerance in a Pluralistic World: An Islamic View. Dialogue of Civilisations and The Construction of Peace. Edited by Thomas W. Simon and Azizan Baharuddin. Kuala Lumpur: Centre for Civilisational Dialogue University of Malaya. pp. 83-110.
[13] Bülbül, Kudret, Özipek, B. Berat and Kalın, İbrahim, Aşk ile Nefret Arasında. Türkiye'de Toplumun Batı Algısı. (Ankara: SETA, 2008), p. 99.

purpose of bridging different cultures such as Ibn Arabi[14] Rumi[15] and Yunus Emre[16.] These few names for justifying this global project are not sufficient. Even they do not represent all Sufis, but a school of thought within the Sufism. There must be some common values that have the power to represent all Muslims and be able to unite them, i.e., Quran, Sunnah (Teaching of the Prophet Muhammad), Ijma' (Consensus of Muslim scholars) and customs, without these parameters Muslims cannot unite to have a one say. For Muslims, to come together there should be a strong references agreed upon by all Muslims or at least by majority.

Despite of our some reservations about the success of this project, there are also positive effects which are undeniable for inter civilizations dialogue and which can bridge the gap between different civilizations. Some of them are as follows:

(1) The "conflict" thesis of Bernard Lewis or Samuel Huntington among civilizations is extremely suspicious. Yet, the Islamic world, in particular, has suffered greatly and continues to suffer because of this conflict theory especially after September 11. Muslims are demoralized and their cultures are debased through media, Hollywood movies, documentaries etc.. Muslims are tagged as terrorists; Islam is accused by promoting heat ideology. Aftermath of Bali, Istanbul, Madrid, Casablanca and London multiple bombings which targeted civilians indiscriminately in heavily populated areas made non Muslims to be afraid of Muslims. Consequently, Islamophobia spread all over the world.

Supporters of clash theory through the "intellectual despotism" with above background got superiority of discourse. They exposed themselves champion of democracy, human rights and tolerance on one hand and demonized Muslims on the other hand for being victim of terror. This initiative gave a chance to those who are for Alliance of Civilizations to change this reality and to have discourse superiority, i.e., to call other people into conversation and dialogue in order to explain what Islam is really about, which message it conveys and to tell and express their feelings against clash of civilization. Simply, this initiative can show that Muslims are in favor of peaceful and harmonious co-existence. By this they can have ethical ground and weaken the positions of supporter of clash thesis. In other words, it will be able to reveal the fact that who support global peace and who support clash for political aims in East and West.

(2) Who does need principles? Who is in favor of laws? It is obvious that weak and innocent people or countries cannot defend themselves and protect their rights against powerful entities only through laws. Laws and ethical standards limit everyone. Because of this fact, it can be said that principles and laws always in favor of weak and powerless countries, as they can be able to claim their rights through principles and standards set by all. Initially, the principles and laws are formulated to limit injustices, under this circumstance, the poor countries will be able to have a say in if they are oppressed. If Alliance of Civilizations can put standards agreed by all or at least by majority which is very slim possible, it will be a great success for the global peace.

(3) This project can be beneficial in order to expose the reality of Islam about its acceptance of other religions and cultures and fight Islamopfobia at international level. It can also force other countries to take actions against it. The Alliance seeks to counter this trend by establishing a paradigm of mutual respect between civilizations and cultures.

(4) High-level group of the Alliance of Civilizations prepared a report which provides an analysis and puts forward practical recommendations in order to establish a peaceful world. This report stresses on necessity of

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[14] Abū abd-Allah Muhammad ibn-Ali ibn Muhammad ibn al-`Arabi al-Hatimi al-Ttaa'i (1165-1240).
[15] Mawlānā Jalāl ad-Dīn Muhammad Balkhī (1207-1273), also known as Mowlana Jalaladdun Rumi.
[16] Yunus Emre (1238–1320) a Turkish sufi poet.

relations among distinct civilizations through dialogue which would be based on mutual respect, understanding and tolerance. This is in favor of all countries and should be supported. That is because all societies nowadays are interdependent, bound together in their development and security, and in their environmental, economic and financial well-being. Hence, it is duty of UN to mobilize all countries to implement the report recommendations.

6. Conclusion

There are serious handicaps for the success of the Alliance of Civilizations initiative as I mentioned throughout the article despite of the good intention of the initiators and progress made last years.

It is in the interest of Muslims to urge world leaders to back this initiative to create inter civilizations dialogue and bridge the gap between the West and East. A lot of things can be done to dominate misunderstandings between the western world and Muslims. The theory "clash of civilizations" which undermines global peace must be challenged with just, reasonable, and persuasive projects based on realistic foresight and realities of the Muslim world, not just on mere good intentions and intellectual discourse. The Alliance of Civilizations despite of its shortcoming is one of such projects.

This initiative provides Muslims a good chance to elaborate whole world the fundamental principles of Islam which stands for peace, security and prosperity in the context of diversity and plurality.

The vision set forth by the American President Barack Obama in his Cairo speech to inaugurate a new era of peace and cooperation between the Muslim world and the West based on mutual respect, trust and partnership is encouraging for the just solutions.