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The Clash of Civilizations Thesis and Muslims: The Search for an Alternative Paradigm

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Abstract

The clash of civilizations thesis, first formulated by Bernard Lewis and popularized by Samuel Huntington in the 1990s was, in the course of time, embraced by President George W. Bush for execution, virtually making it the cornerstone of US foreign policy during the early years of the 21st century. The situation thus created has pushed the Muslim world to the forefront of international politics. An in-depth analysis, however, finds the thesis to be seriously flawed. Despite differences, Islamic and Western civilizations share a number of common values such as human dignity, trust, justice, transparency and freedom of choice. The idea of a clash between these two civilizations appears to be based on a misapprehension of certain events in history and its implications for world peace are simply horrendous. Luckily there are indications that the new American administration under President Obama seems to have realized the essential flaw of the clash of civilizations thesis. The present article ventures to explore the outlines of an alternative paradigm that might pave the ground for peaceful civilizational co-existence.

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Introduction

The term civilization has come into focus in current intellectual and political discourse especially since the publication of Samuel Huntington's controversial "clash of civilizations" thesis on the subject.¹ Since Huntington's recent writings revolve around ideas that concern the future of humanity, a number of scholars have joined the debate. However, several observers of the current affairs, particularly in the mainstream media, are convinced that the

¹ See, Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?", *Foreign Affairs* (Summer 1993). Huntington later developed the main ideas of this article into a book *The Clash of Civilizations*.

clash of civilizations is a fact of international politics today.⁷ It has now become quite pertinent for every historian, philosopher, and social scientist concerned about world peace and unity to contribute to this debate. Some of the questions in this regard that stare us in the face are: Has the idea proven to be a reality? Or is it just a myth which some groups and individuals have contrived in order to promote their interests and ambitions? Moreover, what results can be expected to ensue if the thesis were to be widely accepted as true by the world community? Will this theoretical framework necessarily lead to an all-out conflict between civilizations? Or is it possible that this conflict and its attendant consequences can be averted?

We shall attempt to answer these questions in the pages that follow.

The Context of the Thesis

It is widely recognized that the clash of civilizations thesis emerged in the 1990s in the context of the end of the cold war in international politics. Therefore, one needs to have a careful view of history to be able to properly understand the phenomenon.

Toward the end of the 20th century Robert Nisbet (1913-1996) wrote his *History of the Idea of Progress*.⁸ The last chapter of this work was entitled "Progress at Bay" in which he concluded that "the skepticism regarding Western progress that was once confined to a very small number of intellectuals in the nineteenth century has grown and spread to not merely the large majority of intellectuals in this final quarter of the century, but to many millions of other people in the West."⁹ Nisbet recommended a religious awakening or "even a major religious reformation" to revive faith in and optimism about the progress of Western civilization.¹⁰

The subject was of such a wide interest that several other scholars were motivated to express themselves. As a result in 1987 Paul Kennedy published *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*.¹¹ Even though his approach varied from Nisbet's, yet he arrived at similar conclusions. He analyzed the economic and military changes that have taken place in the European civilization since 1500 CE and expressed the view that big powers have always maintained their

⁷ See the *Wikipedia* article on the subject. Although officially the term clash of civilizations is no more utilized by the new Obama Administration in the US, many journalistic and scholarly writings on the continuing conflicts in Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Palestine and Somalia still reflect this thesis.

⁸ Robert Nisbet, *History of the Idea of Progress* (New York: Basic Books, 1980).

⁹ *Ibid.*, 317.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 357.

¹¹ Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Changes and Military Decline, 1914-1980*.

supremacy in world affairs by keeping a prudent balance between the cost of wealth and military expenditure. The failure to maintain such a balance in modern Europe had caused the fall from supremacy of Spain, the Netherlands and Britain at different times in history. This process, in Kennedy's opinion, continued till the middle of the twentieth century. He warned of a cold war rivalry, particularly the United States and the USSR, of serious consequences in the later half of the twentieth century.¹²

In 1992 Francis Fukuyama published a fairly controversial book, *The End of History and the Last Man* in which he defended the nineteenth century European optimism regarding progress and human nature. He expressed his firm belief that the last man in history, aware of his strengths and weaknesses and of his "perfect rights" and "defective duties," will subscribe to idyllic liberal democracy. He also expressed his firm confidence that "a liberal democracy that could fight a short and decisive war every generation or defend its own liberty and independence would be far healthier and satisfied than one that experienced nothing but continuous peace."¹³ It is obvious that Fukuyama's view of the progress of modern European civilization seems directly in conflict with Robert Nisbet's views.

Within years Samuel Huntington (1927-2008) wrote yet another and more controversial book, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order*, in order to answer the questions raised by him in his article on the subject published earlier in *Foreign Affairs* in which he argued that a clash of civilizations was taking place in our contemporary times. There was, in his opinion, a need for today's dominant players in world politics to understand the nature of this clash. Based on his observations, Huntington made the following recommendations:¹⁴

The subject of interest of all the four above mentioned scholars is not European/Western civilization and its future. The civilization that will witness tremendous growth and progress for at least four hundred years has been facing difficulties since the beginning of the 20th century, and historians and philosophers of history have expressed their strong reservations about its future. Historian Edward Hallett Carr (1892-1982) once complained that the decline of the west has become so familiar a phrase that quotation marks no longer required.¹⁵ Although Robert Nisbet and Paul Kennedy partially agreed with the general theme of the West's decline, they argued

¹² See, *Ibid.*, "Epilogue," 536-547.

¹³ Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: The Free Press, 1992).

¹⁴ See, Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order*, "Preface."

¹⁵ See, E. H. Carr, *What is History?*, first published in 1961, 2nd edn. (London: Penguin, 1987), 112.

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their civilization needed some remedy for its survival and further progress. However, while Nisbet — an intellectual historian — identifies the need for a religious reformation to remedy the situation, Kennedy — a military-cum-economic historian — emphasizes the need for economic growth to counter the problems faced by modern civilization.¹¹ On the other hand, Francis Fukuyama and Samuel Huntington, both political scientists, seem to be more interested in maintaining the supremacy of the United States in contemporary world affairs.

Although European thought had already witnessed crises during the last two decades of the nineteenth century, a serious debate about the fate of Western civilization began after World War I. A number of distinguished intellectuals expressed their views on the “degeneration” witnessed within the European society. This debate especially came to the notice of the common people when Oswald Spengler (1880–1936), a natural scientist turned historian, published the first volume of his *Der Untergang der Abendlandes (The Decline of the West)* in 1918.¹² This was a shocking conclusion about the fate of European civilization, for Europeans had very high expectations about its future. This pre-war optimism is reflected in one of Arnold Toynbee’s profound observations. Arnold Joseph Toynbee (d. 1975), the most celebrated historian of the 20th century who was born in 1889, gave expression to the optimism of his generation as follows:

[My generation] expected that life throughout the World would become more rational, more humane, and more democratic and that, slowly, but surely, political democracy would produce greater social justice. We had also expected the progress of science and technology would make mankind richer, and that this increasing wealth would gradually spread from a minority to a majority. We had expected that all this would happen peacefully. In fact we thought that mankind’s course was set for an earthly paradise, and that our approach towards this goal was predestined for us by historical necessity.¹³

Toynbee’s optimistic observation was based on the progress in science and technology that the Western civilization had achieved till the end of the 19th century.¹⁴ However, this optimism of Arnold Toynbee was shattered by the

two world wars. Toynbee completed his voluminous *The Study of History* in the 1950s. Comparing the twenty-one different world civilizations, he

If there was any validity in the writer’s procedure of drawing conclusions between Hellenic history and Western, it would seem to follow that that society must, at any rate, be not immune from the possibility of a similar and, when the writer, on passing to his wider studies, found that a clear and distinct assemblage of civilizations were already dead, he was bound to death was indeed a possibility confronting every civilization, including the

Toynbee’s “own civilization” is the European civilization. Various places of his work he interchangeably identifies with civilization or Western society. Arnold Toynbee also observed civilizations and societies are always led by a small group of people — he calls the “creative minority.” The creative minority is responsible for effectively laying down the foundations of a civilization; it is also responsible for preventing or at least delaying the decline of civilizations. Toynbee records the cultivation of religious values in order to bring to a halt the decline of civilization.¹⁵

As the century approached its end, the debate became increasingly heated. In the US various groups began to identify themselves as the “creative minority.” Conservatives turned to be in the forefront of this venture. Out these intellectual activities Stephen Tonson, formerly of the University of Michigan, observes:

Out of these diverse strands of thought, these complex movements of conservative movement at the end of the twentieth century has shaped an important to its success was the patronage of a very few founders — individuals who financially supported social and cultural criticism and innovation. This was possible, for it must be borne in mind that in inception these groups were not overtly political. Their object was to influence action. They saw themselves, rather, as a lever in the great seething mass of a democratic society. Politicians of both major parties were disappointed the hopes of these creative minorities.¹⁶

However, a greater disappointment to Tonson was to follow. A new political activists identifying themselves as neo-conservatives skillfully

¹¹ See Nisbet, *History of the Ideas of Progress*, 353–357, and Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, 413–535.

¹² Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, 2 vols., trans. Charles Francis Atkinson (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1922).

¹³ Arnold J. Toynbee, *Surveying the Future* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 156–157.

¹⁴ This optimism is also reflected in the statement by the captain of Titanic, which sank in 1912, that: “This is no contest.”

¹⁵ Arnold J. Toynbee, *A Study of History*, abridged and ed. by D.C. Somervell (London: University Press, 1960), 912.

¹⁶ See, *Ibid.*, 230–240.

¹⁷ See, Stephen J. Tonson, “Conservatives as a Creative Minority,” *Modern Age*, vol. 19, no. 1, 1990, 7–14.

advantage of the surfacing of the idea of a creative minority in the life of a civilization, and the role of civilizations in world politics: they hijacked the lofty ideas of the concerned intellectuals and appeared on the scene of international politics as cynics who would not flinch from recourse to any possible means, however evil or debased, to further the political power of the United States. They turned the theoretical formulation of the clash of civilizations thesis into a reality in international politics.¹⁵ Meanwhile the twentieth century, which had witnessed in the mainstream academia the study of 'the world of nations' as a unit to study of human history and society,¹⁶ turned increasingly to the study of civilizations as the major unit of historical study.

Islam and Muslim World at the Centre Stage of World Politics

While Islam has always been recognized as a major world religion, the Muslim world was hardly recognized as a major political entity in mid-twentieth century. Although Islam was understood to have provided a set of political guidelines, yet it was not widely perceived to have any significant role in international politics. In fact there was a general trend at that time in Muslim countries such as Turkey, Iran, Pakistan and Egypt to follow in the footsteps of Europe, and to "modernize" their economies and societies. Witnessing this trend in 1960s the British historian Bernard Lewis had enthusiastically made a forecast that the idea of nationalism was going to sweep the Muslim world, and Islam as a political force was poised to suffer the fate that overtook Christianity in Europe in the 19th century. After referring to the mission of the Prophet (peace be on him), he said: "Another such struggle is being fought in our own time — not against Al-Eat and Al-Uzza (pre-Islamic objects of worship) — but a new set of idols called states, races, nations; this time it is the idols that seem to be victorious."¹⁷ However, within years in another article entitled "The Return of Islam" Lewis acknowledged the power of Islam as a socio-political force and revised his thesis in 1975 noting that:

A Muslim Iraq would feel far closer bonds with a non-Iraqi Muslim than with a non-Muslim Iraqi. Muslims of different countries, speaking different languages, share the same memories of a common and sacred past, the same awareness of

corporate identity, the same sense of a common predicament and destiny, not nation or country which, as in the West, forms the historical basis of identity, but the religio-political community, and the imported Western idea of ethnic and territorial nationhood remains, like secularism, alien and incongruously assimilated.¹⁸

Lewis seems to have been alarmed by Ramadan/Yom Kippur War (1973) in West Asia which was followed by an effective oil embargo against Israel and several pro-Israeli nations. Perhaps even more alarming was the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979. Since then many books have been written on a variety of topics and themes such as 'fundamentalist Islam', 'militant Islam', 'resurgent Islam', 'political Islam', 'Islamic revivalism', all indicating a renaissance of interest among Muslims in ideas and values of Islamic provenance. In his opinion, however, the 'return' of Islam was not an unanticipated phenomenon. For, unlike Christianity's role in 19th century Europe, Islam never took a backseat in Muslim societies.¹⁹ The question then is: what connection between the so-called "return of Islam" of Bernard Lewis and Huntington's theory of clash of civilizations? We shall now try to discuss this question.

Within years Bernard Lewis transformed his "return of Islam" thesis into a new thesis called the clash of civilizations. In an article entitled "The Muslim Rage" written in 1990 he formulated his argument as follows:

It should be now be clear that we are facing a mood and a movement transcending the level of issues and policies and the governments that run them. This is no less than a clash of civilizations — the perhaps unprecedented *secular historic reaction of an ancient rival against our Judeo-Christian heritage*, secularism, and the worldwide expansion of both. It is crucially important that we on our side should not be provoked into an equally historic but equally irrational reaction against that rival.²⁰

Lewis clearly defines the relationship between the Islamic and Western civilizations as 'we' and 'they,' and in order to justify his thesis he imposes a division on Muslims and manipulates history of both Islamic and Western civilizations. Arguing that Muslims believe in dividing humanity into 'themselves and others,' he says: "These definitions not only define

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¹⁷ Bernard Lewis, *The Middle East and the West* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967), 70.

¹⁸ Bernard Lewis, "The Return of Islam," *Commentary* (January 1976), 39-49.

¹⁹ On this subject, see, Abdullah al-Absar, *Covenant or Nation: Identity Crisis in Contemporary Muslim Society* (Istanbul: The Islamic Foundation, 1992).

²⁰ See, Bernard Lewis, "The Roots of Muslim Rage," *The Atlantic Monthly*, vol. 266 (September 1990), 47-60. Paragraph added.

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²³ See, Bernard Lewis, "The Muslim Rage," *The Atlantic Monthly*, vol. 76 (September 1990), 47-60. Emphases added.

outsider but also, and perhaps more particularly, help to define and illustrate our perception of ourselves.⁶⁸ In defining the Muslim understanding of the "other," his main aim is to develop a new interpretation of what constitutes the Western identity. In fact throughout the article Lewis' interest seems to be to identify himself — a Jew born in Great Britain — with Western civilization and the US (according to Lewis, a daughter of Europe) as the flag-bearer of Western civilization in the world today. One wonders why Lewis is so keen to identify himself with the Western civilization. Could it be because Arnold Toynbee, an outstanding historian of Western civilization, had condemned Judaism and the state of Israel for causing a "disastrous wrong turn" to Christianity and Western civilization? According to Arthur Herman:

Toynbee called Judaism the "fossil relic of a dead civilization" that had taken Christianity and the West on a disastrous wrong turn, inspiring the West's crass materialism and "consummate virtuosity in commerce and finance," and its insistence on a morality of law and stern righteousness rather than the working of the free spirit. Above all, the Jews claim to bring the chosen people had encouraged a Western attitude of arrogance toward other cultures, which Toynbee saw as the real origin of the Holocaust.⁶⁹

On his part, however, Lewis seems to have been interested in diverting Western anger towards Muslims, presumably in order to justify an ever expanding Israel in international politics and in securing Western support for that purpose. As for the expression Judeo-Christian tradition — an expression which Lewis seems to cherish — is also misleading. For there hardly exist any cogent references to Judeo-Christian heritage in the context of Western civilization till the late 19th century. At the end of the 19th century, Friedrich Nietzsche (d. 1900) used the phrase with a negative nuance to criticize lack of spiritual values in that tradition. However, the use of the phrase was deliberately cultivated in order to neutralize Hitler's aggression against the Jews in Europe in the middle of the 20th century.⁷⁰ It is also interesting to note that Lewis counsels his Western audience not to be provoked by the "irrational reaction against that rival."⁷¹ Lewis seems to be exploiting the perceived superiority complex of some Western policy-makers:

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Arthur Herman, "Welcoming Deities: Arnold Toynbee" in his, *The Idea of Decline in Western History* (New York: The Free Press, 1997), 286.

⁷⁰ Information Clearing House, "The Myth of a Judeo-Christian Tradition," *New Discovers Magazine* (February/March 1994).

⁷¹ Bernard Lewis, "The Roots of Muslim Rage," *The Atlantic Monthly*, vol. 256, no. 3 (September 1996), 17, 20.

Scholars, however, have generally traced the intellectual roots of Western civilization not to Judeo-Christian heritage but rather to the Renaissance Enlightenment tradition. The founding fathers of the United States in particular never envisioned the US as an avowedly Christian state. In fact one of the earliest formal international documents the US declared that:

As the Government of the United States of America is not in any sense, [based] on the Christian religion; as it has in itself no character of enmity against laws, religion, or tranquillity, of Mussulmen; and as the said States never entered into any war, or act of hostility against any Mahometan nation, it is declared the parties, that no pretence arising from religious opinions, shall ever produce interruption of the harmony existing between the two countries.⁷²

Our purpose in pointing this out here is not to stress that the Muslim-American relations in the early period of its history were cordial; rather purpose is to highlight the fact that the US was not founded on the so-called Judeo-Christian tradition of Europe. Also, one should note that John Tyler the mid-19th century American President (1841–1845) whom Bernard quotes in his "The Roots of Muslim Rage" article of 1990 to demonize American tolerance, identified Jews along with Muslims and East Indian strangers to America. Tyler wanted to grant all immigrants an "abode as ours." And yet in the same article Lewis would later insist that he himself the state of Israel were a part of Western civilization.

It is noteworthy that in the wake of Lewis' article an appreciable number of noted academicians, journalists and film makers came forth to support a clash of civilizations thesis. In this process Islam and the Muslim world came to the centre stage of international politics. This makes it pertinent to ask what do Muslims want? According to Lewis, Muslims are enraged by Westerners and their "hatred is directed against us."⁷³ He elaborates his point by stressing that since most Muslims want to revive the teachings of Qur'an and the Prophet they must have been directed by "a desire to restore Muslim values and restore Muslim greatness" in the world today.

⁷² Article 11 in the Treaty of Tripoli "authored by American diplomat Joel Barlow in 1795 following treaty was sent to the floor of the Senate, June 7, 1797, where it was read aloud publicly and unanimously approved. John Adams (US President 1797–1801), having signed it and previously proclaimed it to the Nation." See, <http://www.steptojia.org/tripoli_tripoli.html>

⁷³ Bernard Lewis, "The Roots of Muslim Rage: Why so many Muslims resent the West when their bitterness will not easily be mollified?" *The Atlantic Monthly*, Digital Edition (September 1990). Hosted at <<http://www.ahf.net/atlantic/atl90/atl900901.htm>>

"Muslim desire," according to Lewis, would pose a serious threat to the existing international order.⁵⁰

This seems a shrewd move on the part of Bernard Lewis. Obviously, he tried to promote his cause without making any reference to the conflict in Palestine which caused the 1973 war and the oil embargo that followed, and the unqualified US support for the Shah of Iran which was a major factor that led to a revolution in that country. In this context, the common Americans tended to find fault with the Muslims who are, according to Lewis, "convinced of the superiority of their culture," and are also "obsessed with the inferiority of their power."⁵¹ The late Edward Said (d. 2003), a former professor of literature at Columbia University, rightly pointed out that Israel's identification with Western civilization was done "in the hope that more Americans and Europeans will see Israel as a victim of Islamic violence."⁵² This scheme has been successful in so far as many others around the globe joined to highlight the danger of the "Islamic threat." Newspaper columnists, reporters, movie makers and even some novelists joined the academicians in a mission to demonstrate that "The Red Menace is Gone. But Here's Islam."⁵³ Islam became a theme of discussion among the policy-makers and the media circle.

Huntington joined this debate with a justification for his *Waldenschanung* by quoting a novelist! Like Bernard Lewis, Huntington too argued for the need of an enemy in order to define self-identity. On his part, the novelist Michael Doblin, as quoted by Huntington, refers to a "Venetian nationalist demagogue" saying:

There can be no true friends without true enemies. Unless we have what we are not, we cannot love what we are. These are the old truths we are painfully rediscovering. . . . Those who deny them deny their family, their heritage, their culture, their birthright; they very selves! They will not lightly be forgiven.⁵⁴

Huntington goes on to express his conviction that "the unfortunate truth in these old truths cannot be ignored by statesmen and scholars."⁵⁵ Although the argument might appear naïve by scholarly standards, Huntington wants to inculcate the idea that "enemies are essential" for "people seeking identity."⁵⁶ He

echoes Bernard Lewis in identifying the potential enemies of Western civilization. In the post-Soviet era Huntington identifies mainly Islam occasionally Chinese civilizations as the enemies of Western civilization. Events of September 11, 2001 were perceived by many to corroborate Huntington's thesis.

Both Lewis and Huntington carried the clash of civilizations further, churning out a spate of writings. Lewis wrote a series of books *What Went Wrong? The Clash Between Islam and Modernity in the Middle East* (2002), *The Crisis of Islam: Holy War and Unholy Terror* (2003),⁵⁷ and several articles, one of the latest of them bearing the title "Muslims about to take Europe"⁵⁸ in the *Jerusalem Post* (January 29, 2007). As for Huntington, he reiterated his thesis in an article entitled "The Age of Muslim Wars" that "throughout the Muslim world, . . . there exists a great sense of grievance, resentment, envy and hostility toward the West and its wealth, power and culture."⁵⁹ With the support of the Bush administration and its conservative allies the thesis seems to have become a reality in the early part of the 21st century. In order to understand the Muslims' "sense of grievance toward the West and its wealth," it would be necessary to highlight some of Huntington's observations about the Muslim world.⁶⁰

Huntington's Observations about the Muslim World

Huntington believes that a war in our contemporary times involving the states of the world's major civilizations is "highly improbable but impossible."⁶¹ As he searches for enemies Huntington provokes his readers to imagine a possible scenario of a "global civilizational war" in which United States, Europe, Russia and India . . . become engaged in a truly struggle against China, Japan, and most of Islam" in the year 2015. Such conflict may spark and escalate "if aspiring Muslim core states could provide assistance to their coreligionists."⁶² It should be noted, however, even though Huntington puts China and Japan on the side of "most of Islam" the major part of his work discusses the potential for conflict between Muslims and the United States.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Edward Said, *Coverage Item*, 2nd edn. (New York: Vintage, 1996), xxi.

⁵³ See, *Sunday New York Times* "Week in Review" which came up with this headline on January 21, 1998. Although this specific issue was published in 1996, the real campaign had begun much earlier.

⁵⁴ Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, 20.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Bernard Lewis, *What Went Wrong? Eastern Impact and Middle Eastern Response* (New Oxford University Press, 2002); *The Crisis of Islam: Holy War and Unholy Terror* (New The Modern Library, 2003).

⁵⁷ Bernard Lewis, "Muslims about to take over Europe," *Jerusalem Post* (January 29, 2007).

⁵⁸ Samuel H. Huntington, "The Age of Muslim Wars," *Special Dates Edition, NY Times* (December 2001–February 2002), 9.

⁵⁹ See, p. 201 below, especially n. 46.

⁶⁰ Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, 313.

Why should "most of Islam" turn against "the United States, Europe, Russia and India" in the "global civilizational war"? Huntington believes that the reason for it was that with the passage of time the Muslim world was becoming more Islamic and thus increasing the potential threat to Western civilization in international politics.

Beginning in the 1970s, Islamic symbols, beliefs, practices, institutions, policies, and organizations won increasing commitment and support throughout the world of 1 billion Muslims stretching from Morocco to Indonesia and from Nigeria to Kazakhstan. ... In 1995 every country with predominantly Muslim population, ... was more Islamic and Islamist culturally, socially and politically than it was fifteen years ago.⁴⁴

In response to these developments Muslim "political leaders rushed to identify their regimes and themselves with Islam," observes Huntington:

King Hussein of Jordan, convinced that secular governments had little future in the Arab world, spoke of the need to create "Islamic democracy" and a "modernizing Islam." King Hassan of Morocco emphasized his descent from the Prophet and his role as "Commander of the faithful." The Sultan of Brunei, not previously noted for Islamic practices, became "increasingly devout" and defined his regime as a "Malay Muslim monarchy." Ben Ali of Tunisia began regularly to invoke Allah in his speeches and "wrapped himself in the mantle of Islam" to check the growing appeal of Islamic groups. In the early 1990s Suharto explicitly adopted a policy of becoming "more Muslim." In Bangladesh the principle of "secularism" was dropped from the constitution in the mid 1970s, and by early 1990s the secular, Kemalist identity of Turkey was, for the first time, coming under serious challenge. To unclutter their Islamic commitment, governmental leaders — Ozal, Suharto, Kavarov — hastened to their backs.⁴⁵

In order to convince his readers of the violent nature of the relationship between Islamic and Western civilizations, Huntington quotes Bernard Lewis, "a leading Western scholar of Islam," and argues that there exists "no less than a clash of civilizations." He provides empirical data from history, claiming that "50 percent of wars involving pairs of states of different religions between 1820 and 1929 were wars between Muslims and Christians."⁴⁶ Although a number

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 111.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 115.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 210. Huntington observes that 52 percent of the wars during the period involved Muslims and Christians. However, he forgets that during this most volatile century in the fourteen centuries of Christian-Muslim relations the two communities taken together constituted at least 70 to 75 percent of the world population. It is also noteworthy that most members of the UN are either Christian or Muslim minorities out of the current 192 members

of Muslims viewed European colonialism as a continuation of medieval crusades, in academic terms Bernard Lewis' argument is pretty trivial because during the colonial period, when most of Africa and Asia were the occupation of European powers, it was only incidental that most Europe supposedly followed Christianity. ('supposedly' because Europeans were deists and followed no organized religion during the second half of the 19th century) and most of Africa and Asia was populated Muslims. History books have recorded these conflicts as anti-colonialist struggles to achieve self-determination. History has also recorded that one of the major contributions of the United States to world civilization is that it introduced the idea of self-determination in modern times. This not only fought a war of independence against European colonization, but also hard-pressed the world bodies such as Paris Peace Conference of 1919, later the United Nations to undertake the diplomacy of decolonization. Huntington now seems to want the United States to abandon its historical role to promote Enlightenment values such as freedom of conscience and respect for human dignity and to assume the historical burden of European Christendom. In support of his thesis Huntington argues:

[I]t is hard to find statements by any Muslims, whether politicians, academics, businesspersons, or journalists, praising Western values and institutions. They instead stress the differences between their civilization and Western civilization, the superiority of their culture, and the need to maintain the integrity of that culture against Western onslaught. Muslims fear and resent Western power and the direct which this poses to their society and beliefs as Western culture as materialistic, corrupt, decadent, and immoral.⁴⁷

Huntington believes that since the "1979 Iranian Revolution and the intercivilizational quasi war developed between Islam and the West,"⁴⁸ the near future "conceivably even more intensely anti-Western nation could emerge, blaming the West for the failures of Islam."⁴⁹ Therefore, the strong likelihood of a perpetual conflict between the two civilizations, the essential "problem for the West is not Islamic fundamentalism. It is a different civilization whose people are convinced of the superiority of their culture and are obsessed with the inferiority of their power."⁵⁰

We shall now proceed to examine the accuracy of Huntington's thesis

⁴⁷ Although the US never officially joined the world body, President Woodrow Wilson's national self-determination laid the foundation of the League of Nations.

⁴⁸ Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, 213.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 216.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 121.

Is there an Essential Clash between Islamic and Western Civilizations?

We raise questions about the validity of Huntington's basic thesis because his ideas are founded on erroneous premises. In order to establish his thesis Huntington seems to manipulate the histories of both civilizations. Introducing the discussion on "Islam and the West" during the Clinton administration Huntington suggests that:

Some Westerners, including President Bill Clinton, have argued that the West does not have problems with Islam but only with violent Islamist extremists. For seven hundred years of history demonstrate otherwise. The relations between Islam and Christianity, both Orthodox and Western, have often been stormy. Each has been the other's Other.⁵²

Huntington's knowledge of history of both Islamic and Western civilizations seems to leave much to be desired. While a thorough analysis of the historical relationship between Islam and Christianity does not fall within the scope of this paper, Huntington's claims do call for taking a look at history. Anyone with even an elementary knowledge of Islam and Islamic history knows that the Qur'an does not single out Christians as the enemies of Muslims. In fact it encourages Muslims to develop friendly relations with them not only because the latter affirm God's existence, but also because they believe in many Prophets such as Ibrahim, Ishak, Ya'qub, Yusuf, Musa (peace be on them) and several others mentioned both in the Bible and the Qur'an. In fact when the Muslims were persecuted by their fellow tribesmen in Makkah they sought refuge with the Christian King of Ethiopia. The Qur'an also showed a sympathetic tilt toward the Byzantine Christians when military encounters took place between them and the Persians (see Qur'an 30: 2-7). In this context, one may refer to the seminal work by Professor Richard Bulliet, *The Case for Islam-Christian Civilization*, which perceives a close relationship between Islam and Christianity in history and thus seems discordant with Bernard Lewis' view of "Judeo-Christian heritage."⁵³ However, one needs to carefully examine Huntington's proposition that Christians and Muslims persistently constitute "the other's Other."

In point of fact, the Qur'an does not identify any specific religious, linguistic or ethnic group as its enemy; rather, it strongly condemns those who hide the truth as regards the existence of the One True Lord and attempt to

become lords over others.⁵⁴ The Qur'an claims that such people spread corruption on earth in order to establish their lordship over others, especially over the poor and the weak.⁵⁵ It is well-known that the earliest enemies of Islam were the Prophet's own fellow tribesmen, the Quraysh. The message of Islam attracted not only people from the Quraysh, but also from various groups of people of non-Arab ethnic background — the Africans, the Persians, etc. who lived in Arabia. In other words, Islam's message was universal; therefore one could find both friends and foes among all kinds of people. It is not to necessarily suggest that Muslim rulers in history never looked or treated Christians with hostility; rather, it is meant to stress that there has not been any specific "Other" for Islam.

It is also not true that Muslims always constituted the "Other" for Christians. Christianity was born as a reform movement within the Jewish tradition and the two communities — Christians and Jews — remained separate, each other's "Other" during the early days of Christianity. Huntington romanticizes Christian history by suggesting that the "twentieth-century conflict between liberal democracy and Marxist-Leninism is only a recent, superficial historical phenomenon compared to the continuing and essential conflict between Islam and Christianity."⁵⁶ Perhaps the cold war was too close in time to be erased from the memory of Huntington's recollection. However, can one obliterate the memories of the Crusades, especially the Crusaders' brutalities against Orthodox Christians? It is also evident that in the Hundred Years War (1337-1453) and the Thirty Years War (1618-1648) much innocent blood was spilled. Muslims were no party to these long wars. Likewise, in the two World Wars of the twentieth century, the witnessed death and destruction bordering on genocide, the key players were Europeans/Westerners and Christians. The same holds true for the clashes between the Eastern and Western blocs which constantly cast its own shadows over the world for about half a century.

More astonishing is the fact that Huntington ignores the major factors behind the American War of Independence. There has been an explosion of reference to the Judeo-Christian heritage of the American Republic during the past decade or so. The fact, however, is that like Enlightenment philosophers the founding fathers of America too religiously people albeit vehemently anti-clerical. Possibly they had deluded about the principles of human rights and human dignity from Judaism/Christianity which were an important source of their ideas. However,

⁵² Ibid., 209.

⁵³ See: Richard W. Bulliet, *The Case for Islam-Christian Civilization* (New York: Columbia

⁵⁴ See, for example, Qur'an 2: 228, 273.

⁵⁵ See, for example, Qur'an 2: 204-205; 10: 83.

the other⁵⁷ seems to have seized the minds of many academicians, journalists and policy makers. Be that as it may, there is much reason to believe that human beings have become more civilized with passage of time, and like Sheikh Jackson Lee, they no longer subscribe to tribalism; rather, they would subscribe to common civilizational values to save humanity.⁵⁸

Alternatives to the Clash of Civilizations Paradigm

The first question that arises under these circumstances is: whether or not it will be possible at all to ensure world peace in the 21st century in view of the hostile relationship that presently seems to obtain between these two major communities in the world today? Will the United States choose to serve the interests of the historical Christendom of Europe or follow the national values of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment cherished by America's founding fathers? Will the American people opt for a doctrine that is likely to drive humanity towards perpetual internecine feuding and bloodshed or will they explore ways to ensure harmony and amity between the different segments of humankind?

In deciding about their foreign policy options, evidently the Western countries can ill afford to ignore the geographical position of the Muslims in the world today. The world's most known fuel deposits, its most important trade routes — the Mediterranean, the Red Sea, the Bosphorus, the Black Sea, the Straits of Malacca — are all located in heavily Muslim populated territories. Even if one were to ignore the humanitarian aspects of the matter, how can a peaceful atmosphere prevail in the world if the rights and legitimate interests are denied to such a large chunk of world's population?

What is the alternative, then? One option to which recourse has often been made by the West is to create privileged elites among Muslims who are expected to disregard the interests of their own people and work primarily to promote the interests of Europe and America. In our opinion, such ventures have failed in the past and their continuation will further aggravate the present problems by encouraging extremism among Muslims by driving them to sheer desperation.⁵⁹ That is why it is essential for people of universal good will to seriously deliberate how civilizational co-existence can be ensured.

⁵⁷ Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations*, 312.

⁵⁸ In this context Colin Powell's question "what was wrong for a Muslim to be president of the United States" in response to another question whether or not Barack Obama was a Muslim, is noteworthy. See: <<http://ambrosioblog.com/president-chuck/2008/12/scheer-powell-a-hand/>>. Accessed on October 23, 2007.

First of all, one must recognize that there does exist a serious problem regards mutual understanding between Muslims and the West. In order to develop a relationship of peaceful co-existence and constructive friendship seems necessary to identify the values common to the two civilizations. The same way that many Christians today find common values between Enlightenment and the Judeo-Christian tradition, one can also find quite values common to Islamic and Western civilizations. Both the civilizations should consider how to further strengthen those values and be well recognise the mistakes that each might have made in the past and to sincere determination to avoid those mistakes in the future. On issues demonstrate their capacity to resolve those issues *rationality* to the satisfaction of both parties. A *rational* approach is stressed here by rationalism is likely to help both the parties to recognize such fundamental human values as human dignity, justice, equality, respect for the natural environment — universal values that are essential for the rise, growth, stability of any healthy civilization. It will be necessary for the two civilizations to belong to both civilizations to accord a high priority to these values that their own interest as well as in the wider interest of all humanity. This is possible only through interaction and dialogue, as has been suggested by insightful people including Immanuel Wallerstein.⁶⁰

One should, however, not be over-optimistic about the outcome of Muslim-West interaction and dialogue. During the past two decades many of these have taken place in different parts of the world on civilizational and inter-faith issues in which academicians, policy-makers, NGO activists extensively participated. These efforts can only wholesome results if they are characterized by clarity of vision, transparency and a realistic and sensitive plan of action. Therefore at this one must reappraise the outcome of some of the most productive initiatives behalf of the two civilizations.

In this connection, it seems useful to draw attention to a few initiatives which, in our opinion, seem outstandingly promising. Of these, we especially like to highlight two such initiatives, one representing the Muslim and the other, the West. These initiatives deserve to be brought to limelight.

⁵⁹ Was initially serialised in Arabic in *al-Sabeq al-Ahmed* (a London daily). See the subsequent extended statements and commentary of Ayman al-Zawahiri, one of Osama bin associates from Egypt, at <<http://www.freepublication.com/forums/news/813856/post3>> Dec. 30, 2007.

⁶⁰ Immanuel Wallerstein, 'Islam, the West, and the World', *Journal of Islamic Studies*.

for they seem to reflect the intellectual outlook and attitudinal mentality that should inform the quest for an alternative to the clash of civilizations doctrine to make it fruitful.

A Common Word Between Us and You

One of these initiatives was taken in 2007 by a group of 138 distinguished Muslim scholars from across the world. These scholars jointly addressed an open letter to Christian leaders under the title "A Common Word between Us and You."⁶¹

The title and text of "A Common Word" is evidently inspired by the Qur'an's call: "People of the Book! Come to a word common between us and you: that we shall serve none but Allah and shall associate none with Him in His Divinity and that some of us not take others as lords other than Allah" (Qur'an 3: 64). The document emphatically affirms that there are important commonalities between Islam and Christianity and specifically highlights a few of them. Quite obviously, Islam and Christianity are two distinct religious entities. This might give rise to the impression that a devout adherence to them will necessarily drive a wedge between their followers. A deeper look at the scriptures of these religious traditions, however, leads one to an entirely different conclusion, namely that the common denominators in Islam and Christianity are quite a few and are of vital importance. This because both the Qur'an and the Bible accord a paramount place to love of God and love of humanity in their respective hierarchy of values.

This is very well documented in the "Common Word." To take the case of Islam, the Qur'an is replete with affirming God's uniqueness as the sole subject of devotion, service, worship and obedience: "There is no god but God ..." is the first part of the Muslim *shahādah*. This requires that the believers' hearts "must be devoted to God Alone" for "God hath not assigned unto any man two hearts ..." (53: 4). God has no associate and hence "Muslims must love God uniquely, without rivals within their souls, since God says in the Qur'an: Yet there are men who take rivals unto God: they love them as they should love God. But those of faith are more intense in their love for God" (2: 165).

The Qur'an's message with respect to God can be summed up by saying that man should recognize and extol His uniqueness and respond to Him by worshipping, serving, obeying, fearing and loving Him with utter single-mindedness.

The message of the Bible on the issue is much the same: "Hear O Lord our God, the Lord is one/You shall love the Lord your God all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength." (See, *170* in the Book of Deuteronomy 6: 4-5). Likewise the New Testament mentions that Jesus (peace be on him) declared: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and the greatest commandment..." (See Matthew 22: 34-40 and Mark 12: 28-33).

In the light of the above it is evident that the Prophet Muhammad saying: "The best I have said—myself, and the Prophets who came before me—is: 'There is no god but God, He Alone. He hath no associate. His sovereignty and His is the praise and He hath power over all things.'" seems pretty much the same as the "First and Greatest Commandment" love God with all one's heart and soul as found at various places in the Bible. The relevant statements in the Qur'an and the Bible also have another parallel: "... the way they arise in a number of slightly differing versions and for different contexts, all of which, nevertheless, emphasize the primacy of love and devotion to God."

In like manner, love of humanity or "love of the neighbour" is stressed emphatically in both Islamic and Christian scriptures. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be on him) said: "None of you has faith until you love your brother what you love for yourself." He also said: "None of you has until you love for your neighbour what you love for yourself." How empathy and sympathy for the neighbour are not considered enough, must be accompanied by acts of kindness, generosity and self-sacrificingness, according to the Qur'an, does not consist of such outward as turning one's face to the East or the West "but righteous as he who believes in God and the Last Day and the angels and the Scriptures and prophets giveth wealth for love of Him, to kinsfolk and to orphans and the needy—the wayfarer and to those who ask, and to set slaves free ..." (2: 177).

We find this equally emphasised in the sayings of Jesus (peace be on him) who declared love of the neighbour to be of primary importance, a second only to the love for God: "And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the law and the Prophets" (See Matthew 22: 38-40. See also Mark 12: 31 and Leviticus 19: 17-18 in Old Testament).

The "Common Word" is thus an impassioned call to both Christian and Muslim, who make up more than 55% of the world's population, to around the common core values enshrined in their scripture. "If Muslim and Christians are not at peace, the world cannot be at peace." This was the

of the world itself is perhaps at stake." Not only that, "we say that our very eternal souls are also at stake if we fail to sincerely make every effort and come together in harmony."⁶⁵

One very important aspect of the "Common Word" initiative deserves to be underlined. In order to foster mutual tolerance and friendship between Muslims and Christians it does not require them to become lukewarm believers, let alone abandon their religious beliefs. On the contrary, the underlying idea of the "Common Word" is that it is precisely by virtue of their being sincere and devoted to the requirements of their religious faith that they can become harbingers of understanding and amity. Thus, it represents an attempt to erect the intellectual foundations of Muslim-Western understanding on the bedrock of devotion to God and commitment to carry out His imperatives. Evidently this is a more sound, solid and realistic basis of peaceful co-existence and amity.

Muslim-US Engagement

Likewise we also find in the West, particularly in USA, a number of hope-inspiring initiatives. One of these is US based cluster identified as "the Leadership Group on US Muslim Engagement." Convened by "Search for Common Ground and The Consensus Building Institute" and composed of academics, activists, bureaucrats and policy-makers, the Group has made recommendations that seem to carry some weight with the present administration in its engagement with the Muslims.⁶⁶ The title of the Report of the Group seems to indicate a serious rethinking on the subject. In its "Preface" the report explains: "In January 2007, a group of American leaders concerned about the rise in tension and violence between the US and Muslim countries and communities, and interested in finding ways to improve relations, came together to launch the US-Muslim Engagement Project."⁶⁷

The report acknowledges that, "There is a deep reservoir of grievances against the US among Muslims around the world."⁶⁸ Therefore, it calls the "leaders in the US, and the Muslim countries to share responsibility for transforming relations" and suggests that that "partnership can take many forms: exchanges of ideas, commitment of resources, coordinated diplomatic or political action, and people-to-people exchanges, among others."⁶⁹ The

report also recognizes that "the U.S. has a greater impact when we live our ideals."⁷⁰ It shows, at the same time, the readiness on the part of at least a section of Americans to acknowledge the value of "Islamic principles to the challenges of the 21st century."⁷¹ The report further recommends "U.S. engagement should be to help strengthen institutions of governance, civic participation, rather than to support or oppose players in international political contests."⁷² The report also recommends:

The U.S. government, together with educational, philanthropic, and business organizations, should substantially expand present commitments to academic and professional education on Muslim history, religion, and culture, a focus on U.S. Muslim relations. ... The federal government could provide incentives for teacher training; to encourage teachers to integrate information into social studies, world history, U.S. history, current events, and comparative politics courses.⁷³

In short, the report proposes engagement and interaction between Americans and Muslims around the world. If properly followed, this will help bring about a major shift from the class of civilizations thesis pursued by the earlier administration. In fact, as we have argued earlier in this paper, there is no basic contradiction of values between the Islamic and American civilizations,⁷⁴ and a rational understanding of American and Muslim history and culture will not only ease international tension, but is also a step towards creating a better international atmosphere.

The above report also notes Obama administration's fresh approach toward the Muslim world. In his speeches in Turkey and Egypt, Obama explained his policy fairly extensively. He has highlighted Qur'anic values that parallels in the US constitution and has unequivocally declared "partnership between America and Islam must be based on what Islam is, and what it isn't."⁷⁵ He counselled Muslim leaders as follows:

You must maintain your power through consent, not coercion; you must respect the rights of minorities, and participate with a spirit of tolerance and compromise; you must place the interests of your people and legiti-

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 53.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 61.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 79.

⁶⁹ See pp. 202 ff. above.

⁷⁰ The full preteritorial version is available at: <<http://www.americagov/ceofid/pdf/eps/ans>>

⁶⁶ Report of the Leadership Group on US-Muslim Engagement, *Changing Course: A New Direction for US Relations with the Muslim World* (Washington DC: U.S.-Muslim Engagement Project, February 2007). Also visit <www.USMuslimEngagement.org>

⁶⁷ Report of the Leadership Group on US-Muslim Engagement, *Changing Course*, ix. ⁶⁸ Ibid., 15.

workings of the political process above your party. Without these ingredients, elections alone do not make true democracy."⁷²

It is evident that there is nothing in these recommendations that Muslims will perceive to be incongruent with the Qur'anic values. We shall highlight Qur'anic guidance and values on the subject later. At this point we would like to state that it is this kind of approach to democracy and human dignity that is likely to contribute to building up mutual trust and confidence which is essential for peaceful co-existence.

Obama's selection of Turkey as the first Muslim country to visit was significant. This is not only because of Turkey's geo-political importance, thanks not only for being at the confluence between Islamic, Orthodox and Western civilizations, but also because of its legacy as the last major Muslim power in history. For Turkey, as we know, has a rich experience of dealing with a variety of nationalities and races. Obama's declaration in the Turkish Parliament that there was no enmity between Islam and the US was quite appropriate. For Muslims, both in the US and the rest of the world, this was a much-appreciated act of reconciliation. Obama seems to have been following recommendations of the US-Muslim Engagement Project.

On the issue of Afghanistan one clearly recognizes the importance that Obama administration bestows on it. The administration has drafted Pakistan into the affair and has committed more troops. Drafting Pakistan into the conflict was perhaps necessary because of geographical and historical relations between the two entities. However, as soon as the Obama administration announced the appointment of a senior diplomat to address the issue, the administration came under pressure from Pakistan's neighbour and traditional adversary, India, and the pro-Indian lobby groups in Washington began to campaign that the Kashmir problem⁷³ be omitted from the list of assignments of the new envoy. This was a setback for the new administration, for the question of Kashmir is a matter of human dignity and self-determination — values that both Islamic and Western civilizations cherish.

This raises the challenging old question: What does the US stand for? Hasn't it declared its commitment to introduce democracy in the Muslim world? What is democracy? Doesn't democracy call for recognition of people's right to choose their future? If so, why are the people of Kashmir denied that right? In fact, President Obama seems to have taken the issue into consideration in his speech: he highlighted the importance of maintaining law

and order by consent, not by coercion. How does one reconcile questions? Should political parties in Muslim countries fund lobby groups in Washington for legitimacy or should they devote their energy to E-genuine support of their people?

On the question of Afghan-Pakistan crisis, one must note that there be any military solution to the problem. The history of the region is plenty of evidence to this effect. Yet it seems that the administration pursuing the military option. It is quite possible that Pakistani armed would capture the whole tribal belt between Afghanistan and Pakistan initial stage, but one must note that the real battle may begin only after military victory. One may recall the coalition victory against Afghan-T forces in 2001–2 and their re-emergence in 2008–9 as a very reckonable Also the conflict may not remain within the boundaries of Afghanistan Pakistan. There is a strong possibility that this conflict would spill over only to the neighbouring countries but even beyond. The unresolved qu of Kashmir will always provide ammunition to both: to the upholders clash of civilizations thesis as well as to terrorists.

The question of Kashmir demands serious consideration under current circumstances. This is because many fighters in Afghan-Pakistan region have declared that Kashmir should be an "Islamic state" with explaining what it meant in reality. On the other hand, the UN resolution the issue demands that a plebiscite be held to decide whether Kashmir s join India or Pakistan. The idea of an Islamic state has been politicized o the past few decades and it is necessary to highlight some points in the co of the clash of civilizations thesis.

In this connection one should also raise questions about the role of in contemporary times. More than half a century ago Muslims o Subcontinent demanded and achieved Pakistan with the desir operationalise the Islamic ideals of justice, equality, trust and a consultation in the 20th century. Has Pakistan achieved the desire to g the nation on the basis of Qur'anic teachings? Most Pakistanis would pe say that it has not. Instead, Pakistan disintegrated; not only the indege nation-state of Bangladesh has emerged out of Pakistan, a number o national regional movements are also threatening its integrity. Many p have started to identify Pakistan as the "world's most dangerous placee predict Pakistan's looming internal collapse."⁷⁴ Yet a dream about Islan Pakistan seems to be very much alive in the minds of many people.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Pakistan and Kashmir are two questions which have remained unresolved at the UN almost

⁷⁴ See, *Economist*, April 8, 2009; January 3, 2008; *Newswatch*, October 29, 2007; *New York*

Since the Obama administration has already reversed the policy of the clash of civilizations and has extended conciliatory gesture toward the Muslim world, Muslim leadership should respond positively. Civilizational values demand free, fair and transparent engagement. There are numerous issues to undertake in dealing between the two camps: the Afghan-Pakistan question which is related to the question of Kashmir, the Palestinian question and so on. However, the first two questions are the oldest unresolved issues in the history of the United Nations. Since President Obama has mentioned Afghanistan as the number one problem in his Cairo speech, we shall first consider the Afghan-Pakistan issue.

Foreign troops are operating in Afghanistan on the basis of the plea that they are there to assist and stabilize a democratic Afghan government and to restore the rule of law in the country. But mounting casualties both among the local civilians and NATO troops demand a quick withdrawal of all foreign troops from the territory. An immediate withdrawal of NATO troops from Afghanistan, however, is likely to create lawlessness and instability in the country. Is there any other mechanism to ensure Afghanistan's stability other than prolongation of NATO troops' stay in the country? Could NATO troops be replaced by other troops? Could the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) play any effective role in finding a way out of the current impasse in Afghanistan? In our opinion, deployment of troops from OIC countries might be useful mainly because OIC troops would know Afghan culture better than NATO troops. OIC countries such as Turkey (also a NATO member), Malaysia, Indonesia, and Bangladesh might be more acceptable to Afghans to assist them in the process of restoring order in the country. Some of these countries have already gained a degree of reputation in their peace-keeping role in various parts of the world under the UN mandate. However, OIC currently doesn't have a military mandate, but creating one should not be difficult if the US and its coalition partners were to request it to do so. In fact, empowering the OIC would emphasize the point of Muslim self-evaluation of the conflict: whether or not the Qur'anic guidance would legitimate continuous bloody conflict between two Muslim groups or acts of terrorism? Also the withdrawal of the US from Afghan affairs would definitely improve the image of the US in the sight of many Muslims, leading to better Muslim-American relations. In other words, this will help achieve mutual trust which is essential for a peaceful civilizational co-existence.

Although President Obama has relegated the question of Palestine to a secondary position in defining the relationship between the US and the Muslim world, for most Muslims, however, the question of Palestine comes first in the civilizational relationship between them and the Obama

administration would do well to make some progress in this respect. administration would require international observers with proper peace-keeping mandate under the auspices of the UN to be deployed in zones between Israeli and Palestinians, between Israel and Lebanon and between Israel and . . . Moreover, it also requires that Israel be persuaded to respect the resolutions and the presence of UN agencies in Israel and Palestine, and building settlements and housing complexes in the occupied territories. If such as these are taken one should expect to see improvement in international situation. However, to one's regret, nothing of that sort see be happening.

Mutual trust between the members of the two civilizations demands honesty and transparency in dealing with international issues. These common values of both civilizations and yet the Bush Administration, in wake of the events of September 11, 2001, launched a "war on terror" without producing its evidence regarding terror threats. As a result, quite a few people do not trust the official versions of terror threats.² Opinion polls in Muslim countries indicate strong resentment to the official version of 9/11. On the other hand, terror activities since September 11, 2001 seem to be still increasing every year. These serious threats to international law and must be addressed immediately with elaborate participation of government bureaucrats, policy-makers, and think tanks on the basis of accepted methods and values.

Human rights and human dignity must be recognized *universally*, not on paper, but also in practice. Many Muslims identify double standards number of Western governments in their treatment of Israel as opposed to Iraq and several other Muslim and non-Western countries. Both Iraq and had violated UN resolutions but only the former has been punished by international body while Israel has been allowed to flout the world body utter impunity.

In order to better comprehend the situation obtaining in the Muslim world, Muslims should also develop a deeper understanding of the political system in Western countries. Muslims need to understand that Western democracies sometimes allow lobby groups to campaign for specific issues and may receive government's support even though they may not go through proper legislation process. To be specific, the policies toward Israel are often supported by significant sections of public opinion in those countries. Muslims should also appreciate the fact that there are millions of people in the West who, while they are not Muslims, yet they do care for justice and be

² One may find numerous stories and documents in various internet sites such as YouTube.

rights of Palestinians. They should also note that on the eve of the military action against Iraq, more Westerners, as compared to Muslims, came out to demonstrate their opposition to aggression against that country. Western civil society groups such as the US based International Solidarity Movement and *Janakawakawaw.org* have stood firmly against the hegemonic policies of the Bush Administration. Also many Western organizations such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, *Medecins Sans Frontieres*, and Transparency International have been functioning on the basis of universal human values and have thus challenged many policies of Bush Administration. However, a large number of Muslims do not seem to appreciate the sacrifices, let alone the efforts made by these groups for international peace and justice.

Bernard Lewis and Huntington have correctly highlighted the fact that many Muslims blame "Western culture as materialistic, corrupt, decadent, and immoral."¹ However, as we have noted earlier in the introduction to this essay, major Western scholars of history such as Arnold Toynbee and Robert Nisbet too have noted the negative impact of materialism, corruption and decadence on Western civilization. Both Toynbee and Nisbet have recommended the absorption of religious and spiritual values to save the Western civilization from decay and destruction. Can Islam be of assistance in finding an answer to this concern?

At this point one may raise another question: if Muslims have the capacity to contribute to saving a decadent civilization, why have they not been able to mend their own affairs? This is a valid question. But let us take the suggestion on its face value. The Qur'an claims to be a book of guidance for mankind (2: 185). From the Qur'anic perspective human beings have not been created with any inherent taint of sin; rather, man was created in the best of moulds (95: 4) and God breathed His Own spirit into him (15: 29, 38: 72). The Enlightenment philosophers debated this issue without reaching any consensus. The Qur'an suggests that an innate goodness has been ingrained into the human nature, but human beings are also prone to make mistakes and commit sins. This is because along with goodness, they have also been created as covetous, forgetful, greedy and weak.² The Qur'an seems to suggest a pathway of human life that lies between the ideas of Rousseau (1712-1778) and Edmund Burke (1729-1797). According to the Qur'an, life is meant to test human beings whether they act positively and contribute to human civilization or act negatively and harm civilization. During the past two

hundred years social sciences have made significant advancements understanding human nature. Would it not be pertinent for social sciences to re-evaluate their findings in the light of the fate of the Western civilization the one hand and the Qur'anic teachings on the other?

It is interesting to note that even though social scientists have generally considered religion to be an univocal matter, historians have identified a prominent role of religion in all the civilizations in history. At the same time several historians have also been skeptical about the usefulness of religion because of the exploitation of religious ideas by people with interests who tend to blur the distinction between truth and falsehood; mix not truth with falsehood, nor conceal the truth while you know," says Qur'an (2: 42) and "... woe be to those who write the book with their hands, and then say: 'This is from Allah,' to traffic with it for a small price..." (2: 79). It would be worthwhile for Muslim scholars to critically appraise themselves also whether they have acted in a more or less a manner with the Qur'anic teachings? The responsibility for this falls squarely upon Muslim scholars. As for the Qur'an, it puts the responsibility to save civilization on mankind's shoulders alone. For God does not change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves (13: 11). Qur'an does not identify Arabs, Persians, Englishmen, or Americans as God's favour. Whoever takes the right initiative and follows God's guidance will receive His favour. Over the past millennium and a half various groups of Arabs, Persians, Turks and many others — have benefited from the Qur'anic teachings and attained leadership position. In our opinion, the same universal principles will prevail now.

The continuation of the clash of civilizations setting in international politics should be a matter of grave concern for the whole of mankind. Because of the revolutionary growth of communication the world has turned into a global village. Therefore any action for the future of humanity must be undertaken by humanity as a whole.

