

## ISLAM AND THE WEST: CLASH OF CIVILISATIONS?

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In 1993 the journal *Foreign Affairs* published an article entitled 'Clash of Civilizations' by Samuel Huntington, Harvard Professor, former Director of Security Planning for the National Security Council, and President of the American Political Science Association. By 1996 Huntington had developed his article into a book, and it was published under the title *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*.<sup>1</sup> The argument was that in a post-Cold War world, the crucial distinctions between people were not primarily ideological or economic, but cultural. World politics was being reconfigured along cultural lines, with new patterns of conflict and cooperation replacing those of the Cold War. The hot spots in world politics were on the fault-lines between civilizations: Bosnia, Chechnya, West Asia, Tibet, Sri Lanka etc. The civilisation with a particularly large number of hot spots was Islam. It had bloody borders and represented the greatest danger to world peace.

The argument has influenced, indeed, helped to frame the debate about the future world order to an extent which even distresses Huntington himself. It has not been well-received amongst professional scholars of Islam, who have objected to the way in which it has assisted in demonising Muslims and to the way in which, by generalising about Muslims, it has brushed over the many differences of economic and political status, outlook and understanding which the Muslim world embraces. Huntington's argument has been assessed by several scholars, so needs no further elaboration here.<sup>2</sup> However, the events of September 11 and the widespread realisation of the existence and purposes of Osama Bin Laden and his al-Qaeda organisation created a new dimension

by which to examine this thesis.

First it is necessary to summarise the historical, particularly Islamic, background to the events of September 11 and the great change in power relationships between Muslim peoples and the West over the past two hundred years. For a thousand years, for much of the period from the 8th to the 18th century, the leading civilisation on the planet in terms of spread and creativity was Islam. It was formed in the 7th century when Arab tribesmen, bearing the prophecy of Muhammad, or so the traditional story goes, burst out of the Arabian Peninsula. Within a decade they defeated the armies of two rival empires to the north, those of Christian Byzantium and Sassanian Iran. A great new cultural and economic nexus came to be developed which was able to draw on the knowledge and commodities of lands from China and India in the East to Spain and Africa in the West, as well as those of the West Asian lands in which it was based. This new civilisation commanded a substantial slice of the world's area of cities and settled agriculture. In this region there was shared language of religion and the law. Men could travel and do business within a common framework of assumptions. In its high cultures they could express themselves in symbols to which all could respond. Arguably it is the first world system, the one which preceded that of Immanuel Wallerstein.<sup>3</sup> The first notable centres were found in the Arab worlds of Damascus, Baghdad, Cordoba and Cairo from the 8th to the 12th centuries, the second in the Turco-Iranian worlds of Istanbul, Isfahan, Bukhara, Samarqand and Delhi from the 14th to the 17th centuries. There were great achievements in scholarship and science, in poetry and prose, and in the arts of the book, building and spiritual insight, which are precious legacies to all humankind. For about half of what is termed the Christian era Muslims could regard themselves as marching at the forefront of human progress. Over the same period, the odd crusade or loss of Spain aside, they could regard the community of believers created by God's revelation to man through the Prophet Muhammad as walking hand in hand with power.

Over the past two hundred years the Islamic world system has been overwhelmed by forces from the West, forces driven by capitalism, powered by the Industrial Revolution and civilised, after a fashion, by the Enlightenment. The symbolic moment, when the leader's standard overtly passed to the West, was Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798. From this moment Western armies and Western capital overran the lands of the Muslims: the British took India, the British and Dutch South East Asia, the British, French, Germans and Italians, North, East and West Africa, the Russians swamped Central Asia, and the British and French carved up West Asia between them. By the 1920s Afghanistan, Iran, Turkey, Central Arabia and the Yemen were the only Muslim countries free from Western control, and even some of these were subject to influence. The caliphate, the symbolic leadership for the community of believers, which reached back to the Prophet, had been abolished. For a moment it was feared that the holy places of Islam, Mecca and Medina, might fall into the hands of the infidel. The community of believers, which for so many centuries had walked hand in hand with power, had good reason to believe that history – if not God – had deserted it.

For the remainder of the 20th century matters did not seem a great deal better. Certainly, from the emergence of modern Turkey in the early 1920s to that of the Muslim republics of the former Soviet Union in the 1990s, we could talk of a steady decolonisation of the Muslim world – at least in the formal sense. But for many this has seemed a Pyrrhic victory. More often than not they have found Western rule replaced by that of Muslims with secular Western values, while Western capital and Western culture have come to be even more corrosive of their customs and their standards than before. This challenge has elicited from many Muslims the assertion of an Islamic, and for some a totalitarian Islamic, future for their people. Such views have not been not been shared by all Muslims but have come to be shared by enough of them to represent a significant threat to the secular leaders of their societies, and on occasion, as in the revolution in Iran, to drive their upholders to power. These Muslims, who are popularly known as 'fundamentalist' in the West, are

more appropriately known as 'Islamists'. I shall elaborate on these 'Islamists' when I address the significance of the Islamic revival. For the moment it is enough to note that they represent the major opposition to the leadership of Muslim states, many of which have relations of greater or less strength with the USA, among them Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Algeria, Tunisia, Turkey, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, and also of course, the Palestinian Authority. In this situation, lack of fairness or evenhandedness on the part of non-Muslim states is an irritant which helps to radicalise Muslim populations not just in the states concerned but also across the Muslim world. There are the problems of Muslim minorities in the Balkans and the resistance of the people of Chechnya to Russian military might. Indian Muslims experienced a sense of threat as they were first demonised by Hindu revivalism and then, in 1992, saw the Emperor Babur's Mosque torn down by Hindu revivalists. The Muslim majority in Kashmir feel oppressed as they are held down by India's martial rule, while the peoples of Iraq suffer on account of their rogue regime. The Muslim and Christian peoples of Palestine have experienced the greatest injustice during these past fifty years and more. These are all complicated issues, but from the point of view of many Muslims in the streets and bazaars of Muslim towns and cities across the world they represent symbols of injustice and oppression. They represent a world order in which Muslims are victims. They constitute a world order in which Muslims must organise to resist.

There are three significant developments which accompanied the transformation of the Muslim position in the world in the 19th and 20th centuries. They form strands in the long-term background to the events of 11 September. Firstly, Muslim peoples have long suffered a range of feelings from a tremendous sense of loss through to a deep bitterness and rage at their powerlessness in the face of the West. This was particularly strong in the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent, now the home of over 350 million Muslims, originally because of the speed with which the Mughal Empire lost power in the 18th century. Then it grew because of the new competition for power this brought

with rival peoples, and finally because this was the area of the Muslim world most heavily exposed to rule from the West. This was expressed in the most powerful artistic form of culture – poetry.

The 18th and 19th century poetic genre of *Shahr Ashob* mourned the passing of great cities, of great centres of Muslim civilisation. One of the greatest works of the 19th century, the *Musaddas* or Elegy of Altaf Husayn Hali entitled *The Flow and Ebb of Islam*.<sup>4</sup> This was a great set-piece poem on the rise and decline of Islam and its causes. It was highly popular and came to be used almost as a national anthem for the Pakistan movement. It would be recited at the opening of political meetings and have everyone in tears as they contemplated the fate of Islamic civilisation:

When autumn has set in over the garden,  
 Why speak of the springtime of flowers?  
 When shadows of adversity hang over the present,  
 Why harp on the pomp and glory of the past?  
 Yes, these are things to forget; but how can you with  
 The dawn forget the scene of the night before?  
 The assembly has just dispersed;  
 The smoke is still rising from the burnt candle;  
 The footprints on the sands of India still say  
 A graceful caravan has passed this way.<sup>5</sup>

Of course there was admiration for the achievement of Europe, even if of a despairing kind. The secretary of the Moroccan envoy to France in 1846, after watching a review of French troops, wrote: "So it went on until all had passed leaving our hearts consumed with fire for what we had seen of their overwhelming power and mastery ... In comparison with the weakness of Islam ... how

confident they are, how impressive their state of readiness, how competent they are in matters of state, how firm their laws, how capable in war".<sup>6</sup> But as Western power enveloped the Muslim world, there was growing protest against the West. From 1926 to 1957 Husayn Ahmad Madani was principal of the great reformist school of Deoband, whose organisation and influence in Pakistan was to create the network of *madradas* in which the Taliban were bred. "The British and the European nations do not consider Asians and Africans as human beings, and thus deny them human rights", he asserted in his autobiography written after his internment in Malta during World War One. "The British are the worst enemies of Islam and the Muslims on the earth".<sup>7</sup> Muhammad Iqbal, a man who intellectually owed much to the West, accepted a knighthood from the British, and was the poet philosopher behind the concept of Pakistan – a Muslim modernist, in no way radical. In his *Persian Psalms*, published in 1927, he declared:

Against Europe I protest,  
 And the attraction of the West.  
 Woe for Europe and her charm,  
 Swift to capture and disarm!  
 Europe's hordes with flame and fire  
 Desolate the world entire.<sup>8</sup>

The rejection of Europe, or by now the West in general, both as a destructive force and a false model of progress was a theme of many of the leading ideologues who prepared the way for the Iranian revolution. "Come friends", said `Ali Shari`ati in the 1960s, "let us abandon Europe; let us cease this nauseating apish imitation of Europe. Let us leave behind this Europe that always speaks of humanity, but destroys human beings wherever it finds them".<sup>9</sup> By this time, as the USA replaced

Europe in the demonology of the Islamic world, it became the focus of bitterness and resentment, which was all the greater because it affected the lives of supposedly free peoples. Ayat Allah Khomeini's howl of rage, when in 1964 the Iranian Parliament granted US citizens extraterritorial rights in Iran in exchange for a \$200m loan, spoke for all Muslims who had felt powerless in the face of a bullying West from the bombardment of Alexandria in 1882 to the plight of the Palestinians in the present crisis: "They have reduced the Iranian people to a level lower than that of an American dog".<sup>10</sup>

Such feelings were no less strongly held in the Arab world. Here a key focus was the Crusades, which Carole Hillenbrand explores in the epilogue to her brilliant book *The Crusades: Islamic Perspectives*. They permeate, she declares, "many aspects of modern life in the Arab and wider Muslim world",<sup>11</sup> where they have left psychological scars. They frequently referred to the Crusades and drew parallels as they felt the weight of European colonialism. The myth of Saladin as the great leader of resistance to the West and his victory over the Crusaders at Hattin was a central theme in the Palestinian struggle under the British Mandate.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, the Israeli state has come to be seen as a modern version of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem, which was established by what Sayyid Qutb, the leader of the second phase of the Muslim Brotherhood called "the Crusader spirit which runs in the blood of all Westerners".<sup>13</sup> In his pronouncements Osama Bin Laden, along with his fellow Islamist leaders, conjured up this spirit of the Crusaders in Arab and Muslim minds. In a *fatwa* of 20 February 1998 he proclaimed the formation of a "world front for *Jihad* against Jews and Crusaders":

The rule to kill Americans and their allies – civilians and military – is an individual duty for any Muslim ... to liberate the al Aqsa Mosque [in Jerusalem] and the Holy Mosque [in Mecca] from their grip, and in order for their armies to move out of all the lands of Islam,

defeated and unable to threaten any Muslim...<sup>14</sup>

Bin Laden belongs to a long tradition of protest against Western power in Muslim lands, though in this case his words have been followed by action.

The second development is that of an increasingly active pan-Islamic consciousness in the Muslim world since 1800. There are reasons for this pan-Islamic sentiment which derive from Islam itself. Muslims believe that their's is a community, an *umma*, created by God's revelation to man through Muhammad. Moreover, that revelation tells them that they are the best community produced for mankind. They believe that it is an especial blessing to belong to this community. The brotherhood of all those who belong to the community, in total equality before God, is a strong concept which is widely celebrated from the *salam* in communal prayer through to the shared experience of the pilgrimage to Mecca. A concern to cherish and sustain the community against all forms of divisiveness is the underlying spirit of the *shari`a*, the holy law. The classical traditions of biography, moreover, were always designed to show the role of individuals, first in sustaining and enriching the community in their time and second in transmitting that precious knowledge to future generations as continuing manifestations of the community. There is a special magic in the community as expressed by Muhammad Iqbal, writing at a time when it was threatened by the growth of nationalism. In his *Secrets of Selflessness*, published in 1918, he declared:

Our essence is not bound to any place;

The vigour of our wine is not contained

In any bowl; Chinese and Indian

Alike the shard that constitutes our jar,

Turkish and Syrian alike the clay



Forming our body; neither is our heart  
 Of India, or Syria, or Rum,  
 Nor any fatherland do we profess  
 Except Islam.

But 20th-century realities were destroying this charismatic community:

Now brotherhood has been so cut to shreds  
 That in the stead of community  
 The country has been given pride of place  
 In men's allegiance and constructive work;  
 The country is the darling of their hearts  
 And wide humanity is whittled down  
 Into dismembered tribes..<sup>15</sup>

Iqbal, however, need not have been quite so concerned. The community was being re-created in a very special way in the age of the modern nation state, using basic religious building blocks. One pillar has been the great increase in the numbers of those performing the pilgrimage to Mecca in the 19th and 20th centuries – from under one million in the 1920s to over ten million in the 1970s. Growing wealth and the great improvements in transport by land, sea and air have facilitated this community-affirming ritual. But most important has been the growth of global news and communications systems, from the expansion of the press in the mid-19th century to the development of global radio and television in the second half of the 20th. The press flourished in British India as West Asia came under European domination from the 1870s: when Russia and the

Ottoman Empire went to war in the late 1870s; when the British invaded Egypt in 1882; when the Ottoman Empire began to decline, from 1911 to 1924.<sup>16</sup> Such was the fervour and excitement that many Muslims came to dream about the wider Islamic world. Muslims adopted headgear and other forms of dress to indicate their identification with West Asia. For the same purpose they stopped giving their children names from regional languages in favour of classical Islamic ones. Their writings revealed how they identified with Muslims of other countries.<sup>17</sup>

During the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century this process has intensified, with an especial focus on Iran, Iraq and Palestine. Some of the crowds that have protested against allied action in Afghanistan or Israeli action in the West Bank will have been organised, but large numbers will have protested spontaneously out of fellow feeling for their Muslim brothers.

What this strong sense of community, of Islamic brotherhood, means is that, although there are many differences and distinctions amongst Muslims, there is a level at which they will unite, especially when confronted by bullying, interference or invasion from outside. This is reflected in the local press throughout the Muslim world and among people talking on buses and trains, in bazaars and villages. Of course, power players in the Muslim world have from time to time tried to hijack this sentiment for their own purposes, as the Ottoman Empire did with its pan-Islamic policies in the late 19th century, as Saudi Arabia has tried to do through their Islamic Conference Organisation and the World Muslim League from the 1960s, and as Osama bin Laden did during 2001, harnessing global communications technology to his cause with no little skill.

The third development, and in many ways the most important, has been the worldwide movement of Islamic revivalism, which from the 18th century has been expressed in many different ways through differing social, economic, cultural and political circumstances. It is important to recognise that this movement has profound Islamic roots and precedes the assertion of Western power in the Muslim world. From the 19th century onwards the movement has interacted powerfully

with the Western presence and is in varying ways shaped by it. All the Islamic organisations that have gained attention through the events of September 11 have their roots in this revival and this reaction. The fundamental concern of this extraordinary movement has been the renewal of Islamic society from within and not assault on outside forces, an internal struggle or *jihad*, not an external one.

At the heart of this Muslim revival lay a return to first principles. In the spread of Islam from West Africa to China and South East Asia too many concessions had been made to local religious practice, which compromised the monotheism of God's message to humanity through Muhammad. It was necessary to go back to first principles, to abandon much of the medieval superstructure of learning and concentrate on the Quran and the traditions of the Prophet, to try to recreate the perfection of the Prophet's community in the oasis of Medina. At the same time, there was an attack on all ideas about the intercession of God in the affairs of mankind, as represented by the shrines of saints. From the late 18th century, the concept that man alone was responsible for his salvation, indeed that he must act on earth to achieve it, steadily spread to many parts of the Muslim world. This, as is the case with the Protestant Reformation in Christianity, has released vast amounts of energy. It represents a shift in emphasis in the forms of Muslim piety from an other-worldly to a this-worldly Islam.<sup>18</sup>

There are three manifestations of this worldwide Islamic movement which link directly to the present. The first is the Wahhabi movement of Arabia. This was the creation of an 18th century scholar Muhammad ibn `Abd al-Wahhab, who preached a return to the Quran and the traditions and removal of all religious practices suggesting God's intercession. His preaching is the *locus classicus* of the Islamic revival and the name Wahhabi is given to similar forms of Islamic purism down to the present. The message of this scholar, however, would not have made much impact had he not teamed up in 1744 with a petty chieftain of Central Arabia, Muhammad ibn Sa`ud. His message and

Sa`ud's ambitions proved an explosive mixture. They underlay the creation of the first Sa`udi empire, which was brought down by the armies of Ibrahim Pasha of Egypt in 1818. They subsequently inspired the creation of the second Sa`udi empire, the Kingdom of Sa`udi Arabia which emerged in the 1920s.

This Sa`udi state became the corporate venture of the Sa`udi family, dependent on the legitimisation of Wahhabi `ulama that we know today. There has developed a constant and increasingly abrasive tension between the family and state interests of the Sa`udi family and the concerns of the Wahhabi `ulama to promote their Islamic understanding and to assert their authority.

This situation has been exacerbated both by the Western life-style and corruption of many members of the royal family and by the state's close association with the USA. The presence of large numbers of Westerners in Sa`udi Arabia since the Gulf War of 1990 has made matters much worse. Other important factors are the growing Sa`udi middle class who have no representation and a growing population without jobs. As the median age in Sa`udi Arabia is 19.7, the situation will get worse, and the annual per capita income has fallen from \$28,000 in the early 1980s to \$7000 today.

The Sa`udi régime could not afford to permit the US to use the Prince Sultan airbase during the 2001 campaign in Afghanistan. It should be no surprise that the Sa`udis should have tried to gain Islamic credentials by supporting Hamas, the Palestinian Islamist organisation, or the Jama`at-i Islami of Pakistan, the Islamic Salvation Front of Algeria or the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt. Nearly half of the hijackers of September 11 were of Sa`udi origin, and one of the stated objectives of Osama bin Laden, that Saudi citizen banished from his country, was the overthrow of the current Sa`udi régime.

The second manifestation of the Islamic revival connected with the present is the emergence of 'reformist Islam' in South Asia in the 19th century. This is a movement whose ideas and organisation can be linked directly through time to the Taliban. At the heart of South Asia's

'reformist Islam' was the Deoband *madrassa*, founded in 1867 and called by some the most important traditional Muslim university in the world after Egypt's al-Azhar. Deobandis were tackling the problem of how to sustain an Islamic society under British rule. They debated how to sustain Islam in the relatively novel situation in which they did not have, and would not wish to have, state support. The individual human conscience in search of salvation, knowing how to act properly as a Muslim, was to be the driving force sustaining a Muslim society. They embarked on a concerted effort to translate the Quran and other key texts into Indian languages. For the first time in the Muslim world the printing press was harnessed seriously and with enormous vigour to make these texts as widely available as possible. Schools were set up on the Deoband model: By 1967 there were said to be over 8,000 worldwide, all supported by private subscription. This movement has come to be seen as a form of 'Islamic Protestantism' in which Muslims without power developed their Muslim community by themselves. It was a self-sufficient form of Islam which could operate outside the colonial state, indeed, outside any state at all.<sup>19</sup>

The reformist Muslims, the Deobandis, largely opposed the creation of Pakistan – they did not need a Muslim state to create their Islamic world. Once it was created, they carried forward their message both in Pakistan and Afghanistan, where they had long-established *madrasas*. By the 1980s and 1990s hundreds of Deobandi *madrasas* had been established in Pakistan. From at least the 1970s they were assisted from outside by funds, in particular from the Persian Gulf States and Sa`udi Arabia, and also by revenue remitted by Pakistanis working in the Gulf. The process was assisted, too, by the Islamic government of General Zia ul-Haq and by a Sunni Muslim urban élite concerned to consolidate its hold over the many Pakistanis who were moving from the countryside to the towns. Given their long-term connections with Afghanistan, it was natural after the Soviet invasion of 1979 that the Deobandi *madrasas* should perform a major role in assisting the large numbers of refugees who fled to Pakistan. Thus began the militarisation of the *madrasas* as the

Afghans, but also Pakistanis and Arabs, fought their jihad against the Russians. Once the Russians had been defeated, it was but a short step from this to the next stage: Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence agency used the students from these *madrasas*, the Taliban, to create a favourable régime in Afghanistan and give Pakistan the strategic depth to the North-West that it had long sought. The Taliban were armed and trained, and in 1994 they invaded Afghanistan; by 1997 Pakistan recognised the Taliban as the rulers of Afghanistan.<sup>20</sup>

The irony is that the Taliban, the heirs of a revivalist movement designed specifically to fashion an Islamic society which could exist without state power, should have been the very first group of Sunni Muslim `ulama to achieve total and unfettered control of a state – or at least the shattered remains of what was the Afghan state. Pakistan has been forced to assist in the destruction of the monster it helped to create, as it is now being pressed to curb the guerilla groups whose action it has supported in Kashmir. These are not actions which it will be easy for the Jamiyat al-`Ulama-yi Islam (the Deobandi party in Pakistani politics) and its sympathisers to forgive.

The third aspect of the great Islamic movement of revival and reform which reaches into the present is the ideology and organisation of Islamism. Islamists are very much a 20th century phenomenon. They find the solutions of the reformers to the challenges of the West and modernity unsatisfactory because, by and large, they ignored modernity and dodged the issue of power. The responses of Muslim modernists, many of whom led nationalist movements, were no less satisfactory. Certainly they understood the issue of power, but in engaging with the West they were deemed to be willing to sacrifice too much that was essential to Islam and Muslim culture. Islamists saw the real danger as Western civilisation itself. Their real enemies were the secular or modernist élites in Muslim societies who collaborated with Western political, economic and cultural forces, and enabled Western influence to flourish in their societies. Their prime aim was to take power themselves so that their societies could be sealed off from these corrupting influences. They would

then be able to introduce their Islamic system in which the Quran and the *shari`a* were sufficient for all human purposes. This was a system to match capitalism or socialism; it envisaged the Islamisation of economics, knowledge and so on – it was an ideology.

The founders of the Islamist trajectory in Islamic revivalism were Mawlana Mawdudi of India and Pakistan (1903-1979), whose organisation was the Jama`at-i Islami, and Hasan al-Banna of Egypt, assassinated in 1949, who founded the Muslim Brotherhood. From the 1970s Islamist organisations had spread widely in the Muslim world. Among the more notable organisations were the Islamic Salvation Front of Algeria, Hamas of Palestine and the Rifa Party of Turkey. Amongst their notable successes were the dramatic assassination in 1981 of Anwar Sadat, President of Egypt, the steady Islamisation of the Pakistani constitution and law, and, of course, the Iranian Revolution.

It is important to understand that Islamism is in its way a profoundly 'modern' movement, concerned to chart an Islamically-based path of progress for Muslim societies. While concerned to resist the West, its leaders have been influenced by Western knowledge. Sayyid Qutb who took over the leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood from Hasan al-Banna was much influenced by the French fascist thinker, Alexis Carrel, and a visit to the USA. `Ali Shari`ati, ideologue of the Iranian revolution, was much influenced by Sartre, Fanon and Louis Massignon. Erbakan, the leading Turkish Islamist politician was an engineer. Bazargan and Bani-Sadr, early leaders of the Iranian revolution were an engineer and an economist. The followers of Islamist movements are the displaced. More often than not they have moved from countryside to city and look for medical, educational and psychological support, often in areas where the state is failing. Anthropological studies have shown that Islamism and its organisations often provide the means by which both men and women can come to participate in the modern economy and state.

Classically, the prime concern of Islamist groups has always been to effect change in their own societies, to seize power if possible. The one exception to this rule has been a concern from the

beginning with the fate of Palestine. However, we are told that Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda network contains members of former Islamist groups and is in contact with Islamist groups throughout the world. This network, moreover, seems to have been that which from the early 1990s has consistently waged war on US targets in West Asia and the US itself. We need to know why this change has taken place. Is there, for instance, a new strand of Islamism which sees the struggle for power in Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Egypt as one which can only be won by assaults on the USA? Or are we dealing with the personal vendetta of an evil genius brilliantly able to make the anger and hunger for justice in the Islamic world serve his purpose?

How far, then, does this scenario represent the makings of a clash of civilisations, of Islam and the West? It is possible to portray the 1400 years of interaction between the Islamic world and the West as a clash of civilisations, of world views. We can refer to our Crusades against Islam in West Asia and in Spain. We can refer to the annual Ottoman campaign in Europe, which took the form of holy war. We can be blinded by the legacy of hundreds of years of polemic against Islam just as Muslims belittled European civilisation until the 19th century. But, alternatively, we could, as more and more scholars are doing today, note how much through history Christian and Islamic civilisations have fruitfully interacted and played a part in shaping each other.

The roots of Islamic civilisation lie in the monotheistic and Hellenistic traditions of the Eastern Roman Empire. Indeed, its universalism is directly derived from the political and religious universalism of Constantine's Byzantine Empire. Medieval Europe was hugely enriched by the Arab-Muslim knowledge which was transmitted through Italy and Spain. Down to the 19th century Europeans measured themselves in various ways against the world of Islam. During the 19th and 20th centuries, as we have seen, the Muslim world came to be shaped by Europe, And now, of course, Muslims play their part in shaping the West both as communities within, as well as from without. These two worlds, Christian and Muslim, have shared much and have much to share.<sup>21</sup> In a most important



statement the Second Vatican Council asked Christians to reflect on what they shared with Muslims:

The Church regards with esteem also the Moslems. They adore the one God, living and subsisting in Himself, merciful and all-powerful, the Creator of heaven and earth, who has spoken to men; they take pains to submit whole-heartedly to even His inscrutable decrees, just as Abraham with whom the faith of Islam takes pleasure in linking itself submitted to God. Though they do not acknowledge Jesus as God, they revere him as a prophet. They also honour Mary, His virgin Mother; at times they even call on her with devotion. In addition they await the day of judgement when God will render their deserts to all those who have been raised up from the dead. Finally, they value moral life and worship God especially through prayer, almsgiving and fasting.<sup>22</sup>

Arguably, if there is a clash of civilisations, it is between those who believe in God and those who do not.

Do the howls of rage and protest at the dominance of the West speak for all Muslims? No. Throughout the period of Western dominance in the world, there have been Muslims who have felt that Western power and dominance was not a cause for complaint but a call to constructive action. Western power and dominance was based on knowledge from which they should benefit. This goes as much for leading figures such as Sayyid Ahmad Khan, the creator of Islamic modernism, or Mustafa Kamal Ataturk, who gave modern Turkey such distinctive direction, as it does for the tens of thousands of Muslims every year who come to the West to be educated in its universities. These expressions of protest, moreover, stem less from an intrinsic hatred of the West than from the impact of the West on Muslim societies. Often it is part of a discourse within Muslim societies about how they should progress, a discourse in which Western influence is felt to be a constraint. It is worth reflecting on the

sense of self-confidence which Iran has gained from its revolution, a revolution which has allowed it to chart its own destiny. "What has your revolution achieved, what has it given the Iranian people who are suffering from the ravages of war?" a journalist asked an Iranian leader in 1989, as ten years of the revolution were celebrated. He replied: "We have given the Iranian people a sense of self-respect and dignity. Now Iranians in Tehran, and not in Washington or in London, make decisions about the destiny of Iran".<sup>23</sup>

In considering the clash of civilisations, how much weight should we give to pan-Islamic consciousness, to Islamic solidarity? Traditionally, Islamic solidarity has tended to founder on the other affinities which bind groups of Muslims: the differences between major ethnic groups – Arabs, Persians, Turks, South Asians and so on. There are the subnational affinities which bedevil the politics of many states: Kurds, Berbers, Azeris; the differences between the Punjabis and the rest in Pakistan, those between the Pathans and the rest in Afghanistan. We have the great religious distinctions between Shi'a and Sunni. There are the often bitter sectarian distinctions generated by the process of Islamic revival on the Indian subcontinent: Deobandi, Barelwi, Ahl-i Hadith, Ahl-i Quran, Ahmadi, Jama`at-i Islami, Tablighi Jama`ati and others. Then on top of this there are the often-competing interests of Muslim states. For a moment, iconic issues such as Palestine can bring Muslims together, but in the long term solidarity is always likely to be broken by local affinity, local antagonism, state interest, and the mundane.<sup>24</sup>

What weight should we give to the issue of Islamism? Islamist parties form the chief opposition to current governments in many Muslim states. Moreover, given the weakness of these states, given their economic problems, and in particular given their age structures – most Muslim societies are experiencing or about to experience massive youth bulges (the Muslim population of the world which was 18% in 1980 is due to become 30% by 2025)<sup>25</sup> – it is likely that a number of Islamist parties will come to power. Will the accession to power of parties, which more often than not see Western

civilisation as the enemy, bring us closer to a clash of civilisations? Certainly, in the first flush of victory we might expect some hardening of attitudes towards Israel, a revision of oil policy, or a withdrawal of support for UN resolutions supporting interventionist policies. However, as Anthony Parsons, HM Ambassador to Iran at the time of the revolution, always used to maintain, and Fred Halliday does now, these régimes will be swiftly constrained by the political economies of their societies and by the geopolitics of their environment. It is remarkable how increasingly pragmatic the revolutionary régime in Iran has become, whether it be over allied intervention in Afghanistan, sending its students to Europe, or talking to the 'Great Satan' itself. Deputy Foreign Minister Kharazi had to resign in April this year, not because he was talking to the US, but because he revealed the fact in public.

The final issue is whether Osama Bin Laden's al-Qaeda represents a new strand of Islamism which has broader objectives. By his own account it does. He is no longer concerned just to take power in Muslim societies but to wage war on Western hegemony. In his book *America and the Third World War*, for instance, which became available in 1999, he calls on the entire Muslim world to rise up against the existing world order to fight for their rights to live as Muslims, rights he says which are being trampled on by the West's intentional spreading of Westernisation.<sup>26</sup> In Bin Laden we have a Muslim who sees the current situation in terms of a clash of civilisations, and who has created a global terrorist network to resist Western hegemony. In addressing this threat, it will not be enough to focus on the terrorist network itself, the West must address and be seen to be addressing, the many issues of injustice from Palestine onwards which drive young Muslims into the Bin Laden camp. The prize is Muslim public opinion, that third of the world's population by 2025. If we act so as to alienate, or sustain the existing alienation of, that public opinion, we might just begin to have a real clash of civilisations.

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