Catastrophic Terrorism – a Clash of Civilizations?

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Introduction

“The battle, Sir, is not to the strong alone; it is to the vigilant…”

Patrick Henry

The “millennial” generation of ours has witnessed many a ground-shaking event: the Berlin Wall came down, tank hordes were pulled back from the Central Front, and finally, on December 8, 1991, three men gathered in the Byelovezhskaya Pusha signed the death sentence for the Soviet Union; the Cold War and the bipolar system of the world passed into silence.

Although the vision of a cataclysmic clash between the two nuclear-armed rival superpowers has disappeared from the minds of diehard skeptics and futuristic writers alike, the much-heralded “brave new world” has not set in. On the contrary, while the chances of classic wars are getting slimmer, other threats to peace – civil wars, genocide, transnational organized crime, and most notably, terrorism – are on the rise. As Ashton Carter has put it: “On 11 September, 2001, the post-Cold War security bubble finally burst” (Carter 2001; in Cox, 2004).

Undoubtedly, conventional warfare will remain an inalienable part of the international system for decades to come, but it would not be a far-fetched argument to state that a terrorist sitting somewhere on a rooftop with a Stinger missile-launcher on his shoulder or walking around with a suitcase full of deadly anthrax spores will cause more headache for policymakers than scores of battle tanks. Furthermore, considering the ever-growing appetite of certain terrorist groups for acquiring (and using) weapons of mass destruction, the threat emanating from catastrophic terrorism must not be downplayed. The 9/11 provided a crystal-clear example of how deadly a successful terrorist attack – even without using WMD – could be.

The 9/11 bombing was a historic turning point for several reasons: the scope of the attack and sheer amount of casualties finally proved that terrorism has gone catastrophic; the successful attack on the seemingly unassailable1 “Fortress America” showed that a similar, or even more disastrous attack can happen virtually anywhere; terrorist groups

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1 Technically, the mainland US ceased to be an impregnable stronghold decades earlier when the Soviet Union developed long-range transport means for nuclear warheads. What matters more, however, is the widespread sense of insecurity brought about by the 9/11 attacks.
turned out to be no less threat to global peace and security than WMD-developing “rogue states” (Perry, 2001:31-2; see also Hirsh, 2002; Ikenberry, 2002). That terrorism has also gone global is not a discovery either: due to technological advancements, like the Internet and satellite telephony, to name just a few, masterminds and operatives could be ten thousand miles apart (see also Halliday, 2004:6). Finally, later terrorists attacks in Bali, Madrid and London confirmed that terrorism has reached its most dangerous phase – moving from strictly military targets to governmental-civilian and finally purely civilian targets (Berman, 2001: 5).

In a *Guardian* article of October 1, 2001, the well-known analyst Michael Ignatieff has brilliantly summarized the catastrophic nature of this new type of terrorism: “What we are up against is apocalyptic nihilism. The nihilism of their means – the indifference to human costs – takes their actions not only out of the realm of politics, but even out of the realm of war itself. The apocalyptic nature of their goals makes it absurd to believe they are making political demands at all. They are seeking the violent transformation of an irremediably sinful and unjust world. Terror does not express a politics, but a metaphysics, a desire to give ultimate meaning to time and history through ever escalating acts of violence which culminate in a final battle between good and evil“ (Ignatieff, 2001; in Der Derian, 2002).

As every student of Crisis Management Course 101 knows, grasping the essence of a given problem is the first major step for its solution. As Bernard Lewis has noted, “The West must defend itself by whatever means will be effective. But in devising strategies to fight the terrorists, it would surely be useful to understand forces that drive them” (Lewis, 1998:19).

In order to better understand terrorism, this research paper will also provide a brief historical overview of the phenomenon, dynamics of its evolution, ever-changing breeding grounds, goals and the means to achieve them, among others. Interestingly, modern terrorism shares many features of its embryonic ancestor, most notably religious fundamentalism as one of the driving forces (Burgess, 2003), which represents the main conceptual building-block for this research paper.

Religious terrorism is by far the most dangerous sort of all: Brian Jenkins’ assumption of normative terrorist behavior, that “terrorists want a lot of people watching
not a lot of people dead,” (Jenkins, 1975:15; in Hudson, 1999) has lost its validity since the advent of religious fundamentalist and new religious groups espousing the rhetoric of mass-destruction terrorism. As Hudson has defined, “these groups have a different attitude toward violence – one that is extranormative and seeks to maximize violence against the perceived enemy… Their outlook is one that divides the world simplistically into ‘them’ and ‘us’” (Hudson, 1999). In the same vein, psychologist Jerrold M. Post has argued that the most dangerous terrorist is likely to be the religious terrorist, since “unlike the average political or social terrorist, who has a defined mission that is somewhat measurable in terms of media attention or government reaction, the religious terrorist can justify the most heinous acts ‘in the name of Allah,’ for example” (Post, 1997 in Hudson, 1999; see also Whine, 2002).

1.1. Terrorism: Problems with Definition

An extremely complex phenomenon, terrorism has proved to be hard to define, let alone to tackle. While military strategists are redefining apparently anachronistic doctrines to cope with what Jessica Stern has dubbed “Protean Enemy” (Stern, 2003: 27), prolific debates among scholars and politicians have brought about various and often contending definitions of terrorism. A quick look at the different definitions of terrorism in governmental agencies of the United States alone underlines the gravity of the problem, as well as the necessity for a quick solution.

Department of Defense:

- The calculated use of unlawful violence to inculcate fear, intended to coerce or to intimidate or coerce governments or societies in the pursuit of goals that are generally political, religious, or ideological;

Federal Bureau of Investigation:

- The unlawful use of force and violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives;

State Department:
• Premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents, usually intended to influence an audience.

Major scholarly controversies arise for instance over the issue of whether states qualify as the perpetrators of terrorism. Hoffman offers a dichotomy between “terror,” applicable to the violence exercised by states towards their citizens and “terrorism,” understood as violence carried out by non-state entities (Hoffman, 1988). On the other hand, Stern regards aerial bombardment of civilians in wartime with the aim to break the enemy’s morale as an act of terrorism (Stern, 2001 in Burgess, 2003). This is yet another contentious aspect: Neuhold, for instance, defines terrorism as “the unlawful use or threat of physical violence outside the framework of war, which is resorted to in order to achieve political objectives and not for ‘common’ criminal purposes like material profit or for personal reasons like hatred and jealousy” (Neuhold, 2003: 18; italics mine); for Hudson, a terrorist action is “the calculated use of unexpected, shocking and unlawful violence against noncombatants (including, in addition to civilians, off-duty military and security personnel in peaceful situations) and other symbolic targets perpetrated by a clandestine members(s) of a subnational group or a clandestine agent(s) for the psychological purpose of publicizing a political or religious cause and/or intimidating or coercing a government(s) or civilian population into accepting demands on behalf of the cause” (Hudson, 1999). Laqueur defines terrorism as “the substate application of violence or threatened violence” (Laqueur, 1996: 24).

The term “terror” with its modern meaning originated during the Jacobine rule in France, and initially bore a positive connotation as defined by its practitioners, notably Robespierre. Then it denoted violence by the state against a people – an exact reverse of contemporary usage (Halliday, 2004: 5; italics his). That the term has acquired negative connotation is usually credited to the famous passage “thousands of those hell hounds called terrorists” written by Edmund Burke in 1795. Laqueur, however, notes that

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2 “The spring of popular government in revolution are at once virtue and terror: virtue, without which terror is fatal; terror without which virtue is powerless. Terror is nothing other than justice, prompt, severe, inflexible; it is therefore an emanation of virtue; it is not so much a special principle as it is a consequence of the general principle of democracy applied to one country’s most urgent needs.” (Robespierre, On the Moral and Political Principles of Domestic Policy)
“terrorist” became a term of abuse with criminal implications already after the 9th of Thermidor (Laqueur, 2001: 6).

As for the term “catastrophic terrorism,” it was coined by Carter et al who differentiated conventional terrorism and catastrophic terrorism. Stating that “a successful attack with weapons of mass destruction could certainly take thousands, or tens of thousands, of lives” (Carter et al, 1998: 81), the authors pointed to the unusual aspects of such an attack – both qualitatively (usage of WMD) and quantitatively (thousands of casualties). Although all scholars laboring on the issues of terrorists and WMD proliferation have described gruesome scenarios if the former acquire the latter, it would be mistaken to delimit the notion of catastrophic terrorism only to the usage of WMD, since the first and so far the only case of catastrophic terrorism, that of 9/11, did not involve WMD. Undoubtedly, al-Qaeda’s onslaught on 9/11 meets all the criteria of a catastrophic terrorist act as defined below: “Such an act of catastrophic terrorism would be a watershed event in American history. It could involve loss of life and property unprecedented in peacetime and undermine America’s fundamental sense of security, as did the Soviet atomic bomb test in 1949. Like Pearl Harbor, this event would divide our past and future into a before and after” (Carter et al, 1998: 81). Ramzi Yousef’s failed plot to blow up the World Trade Center in 1993 – again involving conventional explosives – would have been the first act of catastrophic terrorism, with casualties approximately 50,000 (Hudson, 1999).

1.2. From Daggers to Stingers: A Historical Overview

However surprising it might seem for the wider public, terrorist acts have occurred for millennia. Gaius Mucius Scaevola’s failed attempt on the life of Lars Porsena, the assassination of Holofernes by Judith, and the murder of Julius Caesar by Brutus, Cassius and their accomplices all represent terrorist attacks. A possible explanation for such forgetfulness, Laqueur reckons, is that “terrorism did not appear at all times with equal intensity, there were periods relatively free of it. As a result, when it reappeared after a
period of relative calm there was the tendency to regard it as a new phenomenon, without precedent (Laqueur, 2001: vii).

Though undoubtedly an early example of terrorist group, the Brutus-Cassius collusion was an *ad hoc* entity, dissolving after the goal had been achieved. It did not take long, however, for the first permanent, “classic” terrorist groups to appear, particularly the Zealots and the Sicarii\(^3\). Both of them were largely driven by religious motives, claiming “that God is to be their only Ruler and Lord,” (Flavius, 18. 1.6) and successfully incited the local population to rebel against the Roman rule during the Great Jewish Revolt of AD 66-70\(^4\). Interestingly, the *methods* employed by these groups were quite diverse, ranging from murdering selected victims and kidnappings to sabotage and even “indiscriminate killings” like the massacre in a small city of Engaddi (Flavius, p. 537) to induce fear, not least among the supporters of peace with the Roman Empire. The tactics of the Zealots and the Sicarii, that of mass intimidation, reflect one of the principal objectives of terrorism, as identified by Neuhold (Neuhold, 2003: 21). The activities of the two groups also meet other criteria generally applicable to modern terrorism, among them targeting moderate statesmen and clerics considered a threat to their radical cause as well as sending a clear message of terror to masses (Neuhold, 2003: 20; Burgess, 2003). One more feature that the ancient fanatics share in with their 21\(^{st}\) century brethren is overt animosity towards more “dovish” co-religionists, labeled as “apostates,” “infidels” or “stooges.”

Another notorious sect of religious terrorists, the Hashashins or Assassins, was terrorizing the Middle East from the 11\(^{th}\) to 14\(^{th}\) centuries. Although an Islamic secret society, the Assassins were at loggerheads not only with Christian Crusaders and Animist Mongols, but also with Muslim Seljuks. Based in a mountainous stronghold of Alamut, the Assassins quickly gained infamy for successful attacks on many high-ranking persons including kings and viziers, often at religious sites and on holy days. Religious underpinning of the sect is prevalent, beginning with the names: the Assassins called their sect *al-da'wa al-jadida* meaning “the new doctrine,” and themselves *fedayeen*, which

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\(^3\) Plural form of Latin *Sicarius*, “a dagger man,” since their favorite weapon was *sica*, a dagger.

\(^4\) Against the background of overall economic plight and increasingly corrupt Roman bureaucrats, the following four events played the role of catalyst: appointment of the High Priest by the Romans (6 A.D.); the introduction of the Imperial Cult, i.e. deification of Roman Emperors; the looting of the Temple treasury by procurator Gessius Florus; the desecration of a synagogue in Caesarea (66 A.D.)
means “one who is ready to sacrifice his life for a cause.” According to Laqueur, contemporary sources described the Assassins as firm believers in a new millennium, and even the fact that they always used daggers, never poison or missiles, points that murder was a sacramental act (Laqueur, 2001: 8-9); while some scholars have pointed out many similarities between the Zealots/Sicarii and the Assassins, it remains unclear whether the usage of daggers by the former also had religious connotations.

Even from the modern perspective, the Assassins’ strategy impresses with its diversity and excellence; the methods of recruitment, indoctrination, psychological preparation⁵, and infiltration of the enemy’s ranks were upgraded to the state of art. Furthermore, moral justification was amply provided by the sect’s most prominent leader Hassan-i-Sabbah, supposedly the first truly charismatic terrorist leader in history, stating that “everything is permitted.”

Christianity was no exception in terms of spawning religious terrorism. Deriving from the aforementioned definition of terrorism by Neuhold, the assassinations of Henry III and Henry IV of France by Jacques Clement and Francois Ravaillac respectively were examples of terrorist attacks. Similarly, Christian military and religious orders, ranging from the Knights Templar to the Society of Jesus frequently resorted to the actions that clearly fall within the category of terrorism. And like their Muslim or Judaist counterparts, Christian clerics were also eager to play the tune of martyrdom and eternal salvation to infuse more courage in ardent fanatics⁶. Alongside many similarities with the above-mentioned groups, some Christian societies, namely millenarian groups of the late medieval age, bore a peculiar feature of exercising what is nowadays described as a “state terror,” as Rappoport put it: “Their terror was a sort of state terror; the sects organized their communities openly, taking full control of a territory, instituting gruesome purges to obliterate all traces of the old order, and organizing large armies, which waged holy wars periodically sweeping over the countryside and devastating, burning, and massacring everything and everyone in their paths” (Rappoport, 1984: 660; in Burgess, 2003).

⁵ Using hallucinogenic drugs, allegedly hashish, and specifically designed palace premises to create visions of Paradise, and dictating orders to the foot soldiers while the latter were in the drug-influenced state of mind.

⁶ For instance, some historians note that Clement did not run away after stabbing Henry III because he expected [the promised] divine intervention to save him.
The ensuing centuries have witnessed both the replacement of religion-driven terrorism by secular ideologies as well as the onset of a full-fledged state terror, *regime de la terreur*, in the revolutionary France during 1793-1794. Since then terrorists have used a number of ideological lenses on the right-left continuum, including anarchism, various offshoots of Marxism, Nazism, rightist extremism, as well as various ethnic-separatist platforms. The recent decades, however, marked a rapid ascension of extreme Islamism, or as Stern labeled it “totalitarian Islamist revivalism” (Stern, 2003: 37), as the most attractive, and undoubtedly the most influential platform for radicals. As Burgess observes, “Today’s terrorism has in some respects come full circle, with many of its contemporary practitioners motivated by religious convictions – something which drove many of their earliest predecessors” (Burgess, 2003; see also Whine, 2002).

### 2.1. Huntington’s Hypothesis

In his influential article of 1993, *The Clash of Civilizations*, and subsequent book, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, Samuel P. Huntington hypothesized that cultural concerns would replace ideological, political and economic motives as the main source of conflict in the future. According to Huntington, the question of identity comes to the fore as “people and nations are attempting to answer the most basic question human can face: Who are we?”(Huntington, 2002: 21). Individuals will increasingly assert their identity in terms of civilization, which according to the Huntingtonian logic represents the broadest cultural entity: “The culture of a village in southern Italy may be different from that of a village in northern Italy, but both will share in a common Italian culture that distinguishes them from German villages. European communities, in turn, will share cultural features that distinguish them from Chinese or Hindu communities. Chinese, Hindus, and Westerners, however, are not part of any broader cultural entity. They constitute civilizations. A civilization is thus the highest cultural grouping of people and the broadest level of cultural identity people have short of that what distinguishes humans from other species” (Huntington, 2002: 43); civilization is also the broadest level of identification: “People have levels of identity: a resident of
Rome may define himself with varying degrees of intensity as a Roman, an Italian, a Catholic, a Christian, a European, a Westerner. The civilization to which he belongs is the broadest level of identification with which he strongly identifies” (Ibid).

A civilization is defined “both by common objective elements, such as language, history, religion, customs, institutions, and by the subjective self-identification of people” (Huntington, 1993). Huntington argues that “the philosophical assumptions, underlying values, social relations, customs, and overall outlooks on life differ significantly among civilizations. The revitalization of religion throughout much of the world is reinforcing these cultural differences” (Huntington, 2002: 28-9).

While nation states will remain the most powerful actors in the international system and their behavior will largely depend on the pursuit of power and wealth, it will also be shaped by “cultural preferences, commonalities, and differences.” “Publics and statesmen are less likely to see threats emerging from people they feel they understand and can trust because of shared language, religion, values, institutions and culture,” Huntington argues, “They are much more likely to see threats coming from states whose societies have different cultures and hence which they do not understand and feel they cannot trust” (Huntington, 2002: 34). As the three blocs of the Cold War are replaced by seven or eight major civilizations, the states increasingly define their interests in civilizational terms, and the principal conflicts will occur between nations and groups of different civilizations. Contrary to a common misunderstanding, Huntington does not rule out wars and conflicts within civilizations. He accentuates the danger of violence between different civilizations because he believes they “carry the potential for escalation as other states and groups from these civilizations rally to the support of their ‘kin countries’” (Huntington, 2002: 28).

Generally supporting Henry Kissinger’s prognosis that the “international system of the twenty-first century… will contain at least six major powers – the United States, Europe, China, Japan, Russia, and probably India – as well as multiplicity of medium-sized and smaller countries” (Kissinger, 1994: 23-4; in Huntington, 2002: 28), Huntington places these powers in five very different civilizations, and emphasizes the importance of Islamic states as well. Huntington’s list of major contemporary

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civilizations is as follows: Sinic or Confucian, Japanese, Hindu, Islamic, Orthodox, Western, and with certain reservations – African. Latin America, as he acknowledges, “could be considered either a subcivilization of within Western civilization or a separate civilization closely affiliated with the West and divided as to whether it belongs in the West” (Huntington, 2002: 46). But when it comes to analyzing international political implications of civilizations, Huntington considers the latter more appropriate.

Consequently, in the Clash of Civilizations thinking the West includes Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand. Historically the Western civilization is European civilization and the West refers to what was once called Western Christendom. In Huntington’s opinion, Americans for much of their history tried to define their society as opposite to the European one and some scholars even spoke of a distinct American civilization. Integration of America into the West, or to put it more precisely, America’s definition of itself as part of the West, took place in the 20th century, when the United States began to engage with non-Western civilizations.

The West is the dominant civilization at present and will certainly remain for years to come. As the West attempts to assert its values and to protect its interests, Huntington argues, other civilizations have to make a choice: either to join/bandwagon or to resist/balance the Western power. In the latter category he has placed Confucian and Islamic societies. “A central axis of post-Cold War world politics,” he proclaims, “is thus the interaction of Western power and culture with the power and culture of non-Western civilizations” (Huntington, 2002: 29).

Huntington has listed the reasons why he believes the civilizations will inevitably clash: first, differences between civilizations are fundamental and often irreconcilable, first and foremost differences in religion and other values, which represent the bedrock of civilizations; second, intensified interactions between different civilizations heighten awareness of differences between and commonalities within civilizations; third, erosion of the state-affiliated identity has enabled religion, often in its fundamentalist form, to fill in the gap; fourth, unrivalled power and influence of the West enhances self-consciousness in other civilizations, which are keen on shaping their futures in their own, non-Western ways; fifth, cultural differences – especially ethnicity and religion – are
much harder to resolve compared to political and economic ones; **Finally**, current strategies of economic regionalism are likely to reinforce civilization-consciousness.

### 2.2. Rival Civilizations: Why West vs. Muslim world?

The entire age of the Cold War has been characterized by intensive activities by all sorts of terrorists, be they individuals or groups, with or without state backing, based on ethnic, ideological, religious or other grounds. The Basque Homeland and Freedom (ETA), the Irish Republican Army (IRA), Hamas, Hezbollah, the Tamil Tigers, Baader-Meinhof Group, Carlos the Jackal, and Timothy McVeigh to name just few, all have carried out deadly attacks, some of them in several countries and for a long period of time. Nor did the Cold-War terrorist attacks lack deadliness (241 killed in the terrorist bombing of US Marine barracks in Beirut in 1983), resolve (the daring raid on the OSCE headquarters by the Jackal in 1975) or publicity (Munich massacre by the Black September group in 1972). But against the background of the ever-present menace of an apocalyptic nuclear clash between NATO and the Warsaw Pact, with its phases of crises and détente, terrorism has never qualified for a terminal illness.

Having defeated the Communist bloc, the liberal democratic West spearheaded by the United States seemed to appear as the uncontested dominant power, leading to vociferous though naïve claims on the part of certain scholars, for example, Francis Fukuyama, that from now on Western values would be embraced around the world (Fukuyama, 1989). But Fukuyama does not appear to lack supporters. “The twentieth century ended with a *single surviving model of human progress*,” US President George W. Bush has declared, “based on non-negotiable demands of human dignity, the rule of law, limits on the power of the state, respect for women and private property and free speech and equal justice and religious tolerance” (quoted in Hirsh, 2002:26; italics mine). In the same vein, Naipaul has argued that the Western civilization is the “universal civilization” that “fits all men” (in Huntington, 1993).
On the contrary, a large-scale backlash is discernible, first and foremost in the form of rising Islam fundamentalism, which denounces the West as “atheistic, egoistic, materialistic and hedonistic” (Neuhold, 2003: 18), and which has spawned an ever-growing number of terrorist organizations. The aims of these organizations vary considerably, often corresponding to their size and origin – fighting secular, “apostate” rulers of Muslim states; liberation of Palestine (incidentally, for many this means the whole territory of the former British mandate, including the territory of Israel); destruction of Israel; freeing Iraq and Afghanistan from “Western invaders”; and most importantly, restoration of the Caliphate. All these terrorists, however, share one leitmotif – extreme enmity towards the West, “the Great Satan,” who has to be blamed for all mishaps in the Muslim world. As Paul Berman has described the world outlook of Islam fundamentalists, “They believe that their own societies have been infested with a hideous inner corruption, which must be rooted out. They observe that the inner infestation is supported by powerful external forces” (Berman, 2001: 3).

True, there is nothing inherently evil in Islam, and as some scholars observe, the Judeo-Christian Bible also contains passages that could be interpreted to justify all kinds of violence (Halliday, 2004: 6; Munthe, 2005: 1; Booth and Dunne, 2002: 5). What Halliday overlooks, however, is the influence and standing of the clergy – as the most authoritative masters of interpretation – in the respective societies: the West has secularized long ago, effectively diminishing the Church’s clout over society; the Muslim world largely has not. Cardinals have almost completely lost the magniloquence and “inciting” skills of the age of Urban II; ayatollahs have not.

The importance of secularism as a powerful precondition for peace was summarized by Fukuyama: “If politics is based on something like religion, there will never be any civil peace because people cannot agree on fundamental religious values” (Fukuyama, 2002: 30). Just a quick look at the European history suffices to confirm the truth of

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8 Compare: “Slay the idolaters wherever you find them, and take them captive and besiege them and lie in wait for them in every ambush.” Qur’an, Sura 9:5; “Fight those who believe not in Allah nor the Last Day, nor hold that forbidden which hath been forbidden by Allah and his Messenger, nor acknowledge the religion of Truth, (even if they are) People of the Book.” Qur’an, Sura 9:29; and “And when the Lord thy God shall deliver them before thee (Hittites, Gergashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites and the Hivites); thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor show mercy unto them … ye shall deal with them, ye shall destroy their altars and break down their images and cut down their groves …” Deuteronomy, Chapter 7, verses 2 to 5 (in Munthe, 2005)
Fukuyama’s assertion: separation of the State and the Church finally put an end to the bloody conflicts that raged between Protestants and Catholics and devastated Europe during the sixteenth and seventeenth century. “Only by depriving religious institutions of coercive power, it seemed,” Lewis argues, “could Christendom restrain the murderous intolerance and persecution that Christians had visited on followers of other religions and most of all, on those who professed other forms of their own” (Lewis, 1990). A good lesson, though expensive.

Lewis, who has coined the controversial phrase “clash of civilizations,” views Islamist fundamentalism through historical prism and considers it a continuation of centuries-long rivalry between Christendom and the Muslim world, marked by “jihads and crusades, conquests and re-conquests.” According to Lewis, the Muslims understood from the early stage that the main threat emanated from the north and west – from “a competing world religion, a distinctive civilization inspired by that religion, and empire that, though much smaller than theirs, was no less ambitious in its claims and aspirations” (Lewis, 1990). The struggle for power and territory went hand in hand with the struggle of ideas and ideals, and since both religions had universal aspirations, the natural consequences were large-scale conflicts. Religions, Lewis asserts, know periods when they inspire in some of their followers a mood of hatred and violence, and Islam is no exception. “It is our misfortune that part, though by no means all or even most, of the Muslim world is now going through such a period” (Lewis, 1990).

Confucianism could serve as another counterweight to the West’s ideological domination (Huntington, 1993; Huntington, 1996; Neuhold, 2003), but several crucial factors should be mentioned here: first, a deep-rooted belief among the Chinese in the superiority of their culture compared to the rest makes the Sinic civilization less susceptible to Western intervention; second, unlike the divided Muslim world, China’s booming economy, the status of established nuclear power, and a seat in the UN Security Council endows China with numerous leverages to speak with the West on equal terms,

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9 The influential Belgian historian Henri Pirenne in his seminal work *Mohammed and Charlemagne* also refers to the historic rivalry of Christendom and the Muslim world. In this case, however, Muslim conquests in fact gave rise to a new civilization dominated by the northern powers of Germany and Carolingian France, whose mission was to defend the West (Pirenne, 1939; in Said, 2001).

10 In quantitative terms, Muslim states and Muslim minorities are involved in approx. 80-90 percent of all sub-state terrorist conflicts (Laqueur, 1999; Laqueur, 2001; in Booth and Dunne, 2002: 9)
hence there is no rationale for China to back terrorists, overtly or covertly, to advance its goals; third, there is no Confucian clergy to inflame hordes of zealous religious terrorists.

2.3. “La Revanche de Dieu”

As George Weigel has remarked, the “unsecularization of the world is one of the dominant social factors of life in the late twentieth century.” In the same vein, Booth and Dunne argue that “We not only learned that God is not dead, but also as G. K. Chesterton put it a century earlier – that many people found it easier to believe in anything rather than believe in nothing” (Booth and Dunne, 2002: 19). The rise of religious terrorism – an unwanted though not unnatural byproduct of the religious revival – is not a new phenomenon, as I have noted elsewhere. In terms of scope and intensity, however, the new trend is truly unique, since it drives terrorism among Christians and Muslims, Hindus and Judaists alike (Whine, 2002; for the rise of fundamentalism see also Huntington, 1993; Martín-Muñoz, 2002; Paz, 2000). Below I will attempt to explain why the religious component is so important in modern terrorism and how it serves al Qaeda’s goals in particular.

La Revanche de Dieu, as Gilles Kepel has labeled the current religious revivalism, provides a powerful basis for (re-)establishing identity. “Religion is often the fault-line along which the sides divide,” Jonathan Sacks explains, “The reason for this is simple. Whereas the 20th century was dominated by the politics of ideology, the 21st century will be dominated by the politics of identity. … [When] politics turns from ideology to identity, people inevitably turn to religion, the great repository of human wisdom on the questions ‘Who am I’ and ‘Of what narrative am I a part?’” (Sacks, 2002), This process is particularly salient in the Islam world, where the failure of Western ideologies (socialism, liberalism) as well as of pan-Arabism and anti-imperialism has turned the new generation to Islam for cultural reassurance (Martín-Muñoz, 2002:7; see also Paz, 2000; Roy, 2002; Huntington, 2002: 116). Fukuyama is more concrete and focuses on the rise of “a more abstract literary form of Islam that calls [the Muslims] back to a purer version of the religion” (Fukuyama, 2002: 32). “This new form of radical Islam,” he goes on, “is
immensely appealing because it purports to explain the loss of values and cultural disorientation that the modernization process itself has engendered” (Ibid).

Religion, Huntington argues, is a central, perhaps even the central, element, of civilization,\(^{11}\) (Huntington 2002: 66; italics his) which discriminates even more sharply and exclusively among people then ethnicity does. According to him, a person can be half-French and half-Arab and simultaneously even a citizen of two countries, while it is more difficult to be half-Catholic and half-Muslim (Huntington, 1993: 5). Despite the controversies *The Clash of Civilizations* has evoked this argument is irrefutable. Consequently, religion is an equally effective mechanism to enhance the sense of commonality within a given civilization, successfully transcending nationalistic or ethnic prejudices. Bin Ladin’s February 2003 message to the Iraqi people, urging them to fight united against the Americans, irrespective of whether they were Arabs or non-Arabs (Kurds), Sunnis, or Shi’a (Raman, 2003; in Karmon, 2006), is just one example how well al Qaeda understands and uses Huntington’s concepts.

Transnational dimension of Islam is particularly interesting since Islamists “have repeatedly portrayed the division of the Muslim world into separate nations as the product of imported, western ideas of nationalism and imperialism\(^{12}\)” (Halliday, 1997: 2; see also Laqueur, 2003: 20). As Halliday explains, the idea of powerful Islamic transnationalism is based on two elements: century-long transnational activities (be it political, financial, commercial or religious) in the Islam world; Islam as a doctrinal system which favors transnational ties (Ibid). At the same time, this author (and host of others) also points to equally strong national and ethnic identities in the Muslim world, highlighting relevant passages from the Koran. On the contrary, An-Na’im argues that since Islam addresses the individual Muslim directly, there is a strong sense of obligation to comply with the Sharia regulations, “regardless of the official policy or action of the state as such” (An-Na’im, 2004: 166). While An-Na’im is an ardent opponent of Huntington’s theory, he fails to see that the two main conclusions that derive from his aforementioned argument – that Islam is truly transnational, and what is more important,

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\(^{11}\) Acknowledged as early as 5\(^{th}\) century B.C., when the Athenians pledged not to betray the Spartans: “For there are many and powerful considerations that forbid us to do so, even if we were inclined. First and chief, the images and dwelling of the gods, burnt and laid ruins” (in Huntington, 2002: 42 ).

\(^{12}\) Ayatollah Khomeini himself has remarked: “Islam has been slapped in the face by nationalism” (Ibid).
that self-identification with religion prevails over self-identification with nation and state – in fact echo the basic concepts of Huntington. All in all, whatever the outcome of scholarly debates over the intricacies of Islam’s canons, the slogan “Muslims of the world, unite” *a la al Qaeda* has not lost its appeal, and as long as the ayatollahs adhere to the same view it would be rather hard (and risky) for moderate Muslim clerics to argue the opposite.

Moreover, by invoking religion Osama bin Ladin and his marshals have successfully managed another perennial problem of terrorism, that of moral justification. As Bonnie Cordes has observed, “Debates over the justification of violence, the types of targets, and the issue of discriminate versus discriminate killing are endemic to a terrorist group” (Cordes, 1987; in Hudson, 1999; for the necessity of justification see also Laqueur, 1996: 23). Labeling the enemies as “the infidel,” Albert Bandura argues, is a technique of moral disengagement (Bandura, 1990; in Hudson, 1999).

### 2.4. Realpolitik or Good vs. Evil?

Modern terrorism is a complex, multi-faceted phenomenon which is driven by a wide variety of factors, including political, economic, ideological, religious and psychological ones – often overlapping and mutually reinforcing. Paul Wilkinson has opined that the causes of terrorism are in general the same as the causes of revolution and political violence in general, and include ethnic conflicts, religious and ideological conflicts, poverty, modernization stresses, political inequities, lack of peaceful communication channels, traditions of violence, the existence of a revolutionary group, governmental weakness and ineptness, erosions of confidence in a regime, and deep divisions within governing elites and leadership groups (Wilkinson 1977; in Hudson, 1999).
Major scholarly controversies have arisen over the weight of each of them. Some view the current situation as a new Cold War, this time the war of ideas between Western Liberalism and Islam fundamentalism, as Berman has put it: “the liberal ideal against the ideal of a blocklike, unchanging society; the idea of freedom against the idea of absolute truth; the idea of diversity against the idea of purity; the idea of change and novelty against the idea of total stability; the idea of rational lucidity against the instinct of superstitious hatred” (Berman, 2001:8; see also Hirsh, 2002). Critics of this approach, however, argue that the hostility stems not from general irreconcilability of the West and Islam, but “the way in which a Western cultural universe has been arbitrarily elevated into an absolute universal reference” (Martín-Muñoz, 2002: 8). And Huntington himself has noted that “the efforts of the West to promote its values of democracy and liberalism to universal values…engender countering responses from other civilizations” (Huntington, 1993; italics mine). This debate leads to an interesting discovery: regardless of whether Western values per se are deemed hostile or it is just their universalization that breeds enmity and readiness to retaliate, the importance of values (and of their difference) is duly acknowledged. Incidentally, this is the first argument of Huntington.

Other scholars point to the Western, primarily American, unilateral policies in the region – among them the issue of Palestine and support to autocratic regimes – as the main cause for the rising anti-Western sentiment (see Halliday, 2004; Martín-Muñoz, 2002; An-Na’im, 2004). The trajectory of anti-Western violence, however, does not follows the American foreign policy the way those experts would expect. Laqueur has noticed that intensification of Islamist terrorism directed against the US took place during the period when US policies were positive with regards to the Muslim world13 (Laqueur, 2003). In the similar vein, the leading Middle-East expert Bernard Lewis points out that while Western powers have pursued many policies that caused rightful anger in the Muslim world, the anti-Western sentiment did not weaken even when these policies were abandoned and the problems resolved (Lewis, 1990).

13 “Islamist terrorism against the United States was rampant in particular during the Carter administration, which tried harder than any other to establish friendly relations with the Muslim world, arming the Afghan rebels, for instance. The next major upsurge of Muslim terrorism directed against the United States came under the Clinton administration when the Oslo peace process was under way and when Washington interfered to protect the Muslims in former Yugoslavia” (Laqueur, 2001: 20-1).
Although the supporters of the purely “political” version of Islamist terrorism may present sound arguments, dismissal or downplaying of the religious/civilizational component fails on various accounts, especially when it comes to the Western policies in the Middle East and al Qaeda’s objectives, which are analyzed below.

3.1. Notion of the Holy Land

Muslim grievances against the West are numerous and could be traced centuries back. As Robert Kuttner has summarized, “Certainly the West’s own swagger, from the Crusades through Churchill’s carving up the post-Ottoman Near East, the cynical politics of oil, the propping up of client states from Iran to Egypt, and the double standard on Israeli excess have all stoked fundamentalist Islamic rage” (Kuttner, 2001; see also Halliday, 2004; Martín-Muñoz, 2002). The ouster of the governments in Afghanistan and Iraq as well as the current impasse over Iran are more recent elements in this long list.

Some of the allegations reflect accepted historical truth; others represent nothing but unrecognizably distorted facts or misinterpretations of actual events by incendiary clerics, as a rule augmented by references to holy texts. The Gulf War, Operation Desert Storm, is a paragon example of such a reasoning: initially, when one Muslim country (Iraq) invaded another (Kuwait) and intruded in one more (Saudi Arabia), about ten Muslim countries contributed troops to the US-led coalition, and some Muslim jurists justified the alliance with foreign powers on the grounds of Saddam’s actions “running afoul of Islam’s strictures” (Ajami, 2001:11). Seven years later, however, when the Declaration of the World Islamic Front for Jihad against the Jews and the Crusaders came out, Osama Bin Ladin’s understanding of the Gulf War as the US aggression against Iraq had already enjoyed a solid foothold in the Muslim world and hence was of little surprise for scholars either. As Lewis has summed up, “For holy warriors of any faith, the faithful are always right and the infidels always wrong, whoever the protagonists and whatever the circumstances of their encounter” (Lewis, 1998:16).

Even if one dismisses all the rhetoric over oil politics and backing of the loathsome rulers, the [perceived] culpability of the West, first and foremost the US, is far from over.
The mere presence of the West in the region is a source of uneasiness, bitterness and animosity, not least because it clashes with an elusive, yet deeply embedded notion of the holy land (see for example, Smith, 2002; Laqueur, 2003). The alleged deathbed utterance by the Prophet that “Let there not be two religions in Arabia,” in fact implying the presence of non-believers, was accepted as a commandment (and put into effect) ever since the times of the Caliph Umar. Therefore, it is of no surprise why the Western presence is considered an offense, and why those governments who let them in are seen as heretics. As Lewis has observed, “Where their holy land is involved, many Muslims tend to define the struggle – and sometimes also the enemy – in religious terms, seeing the American troops sent to free Kuwait and save Saudi Arabia from Saddam Hussein as infidel invaders and occupiers” (Lewis, 1998: 18-19). Following this chain of reasoning, the hosts of mujahedeen swarming into Iraqi territory from all over the world responding to the calls to jihad are not unexpected, since unlike the First Gulf War there are no Muslim allies around with their influential clerics to at least partially becalm the outraged masses.

3.2. The West: What Kind of Policy?

Pondering on the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, which in the end was viewed by many as an American conspiracy to lure Saddam in order to have a pretext for stationing troops in the region (Ajami, 2001: 11), one might wonder what kind of policy the US should conduct in the Middle East without causing a negative reaction. Ever since the discovery of oil and ensuing presence of the “infidels”, all policies of the US are viewed with inherent mistrust. The unquestioned primacy and power of the US “in the infidel world” only add fuel to this sentiment (Lewis, 1998:19; see also Hirsh, 2002) As the religious scholar Safar-al-Hawali has proclaimed in the aftermath of the First Gulf War, “this has been a bigger calamity than I had expected, bigger then any threat the Arabian Peninsula had faced since God Almighty created it” (quoted in Ajami, 2001: 6).

The War in Bosnia and the Kosovo Crisis highlight the difficulty of improving the US reputation in the Muslim world. In both cases, the US actually went to war on the Muslim
side, and the results speak of themselves. The Western intervention – and not the mujahedeen or weapons amply provided by Muslim states – saved tens of thousands of Bosnian and Kosovar Muslims. Did it make the US appear in a more positive light? Unfortunately not (see, for example, Hirsh, 2002; Peterson, 2002; Huntington, 1993; Berman, 2001; Fukuyama, 2002).

The Israeli-Palestine conflict is another major example of this forgetfulness. As the US is generally seen as a supporter of Israel, many consider the Palestinian issue as one of the reasons behind the 9/11 attacks. What these pundits miss is the fact that the anti-American sentiments in the region had passed the boiling point long before the first intifada began, and Bin Ladin himself has started to play the Palestinian tune only recently, largely to serve his own goal of gaining solidarity from the Arab masses and to attract more recruits (Karmon, 2006: 5; see also Schweitzer, 2001; Stern, 2003: 29-30). Furthermore, many tend to forget the time and dime the US spent on resolving the conflict, and the financial aid it has provided for the bedeviled Palestinian Authority.

The support to the authoritarian governments comes next on the list. But while the US did depose the despotic regimes of the Taliban and Saddam Hussein, this did not engender a widespread positive feedback. On the contrary, Bin Ladin and his top lieutenants once again skillfully managed to present these wars as the continuation of the everlasting “Crusader” assault on the Muslim world. Moreover, as Gause has noted, even the triumph of democracy should not be equated with more secure peace or improved relations with the West or Israel, since the high levels of anti-Americanism in public opinion in the Muslim world would necessarily be translated into more anti-American policies if such Muslims could vote on their preferences (Gause, 2005). Guttman also argues that the terrorist requires a liberal rather than a right-wing audience for success as well as liberal control of the media for the transmission of his ideology (Guttman, 1979; in Hudson, 1999).

The causal links between democracy and liberalism on the one hand and peace and reduced threat of terrorism on the other, both in general and in application to the Muslim

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14 Including the then chief Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat (quoted in Ajami, 2001: 13)
15 Had certain Muslim states been as committed to the issue of Palestine as they are to the idea of destroying the state of Israel, the PA would face fewer financial problems right now. Therefore, the poetic statement by Martín-Muñoz, that the plight of the Palestinians is an “ever-present wound” for the Muslim world (Martín-Muñoz, 2002:9), fails to reflect reality.
world, are already a topic of heated debates\textsuperscript{16}, but repeated calls for the destruction of Israel by the \textit{democratically elected} President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad of Iran and Hamas’ recent victory in the Palestinian parliamentary elections show that Gause certainly has a point.

Al Qaeda might call upon the masses to liberate “fellow Palestinian Muslims,” but it has no vested interest in supporting democracy or nation-building in Palestine or elsewhere. Deriving from the axiomatic concept that failed states provide excellent safe havens for terrorists, al Qaeda is naturally the main beneficiary of a lasting political turmoil. Moreover, the identity crisis among the population of failed states transforms Al Qaeda into a powerful medium of reasserting identity; this time via radical Islamism.

And finally, as Bin Ladin has constantly declared, he clearly does not favor democracy, referring to it “deviant and misleading practice” and “the faith of the ignorant” and lambasting those in the Arab world who are “calling for a peaceful democratic solution in dealing with apostate governments or with Jewish and crusader invaders instead of fighting in the name of God\textsuperscript{17}” (Gause, 2005). What Bin Ladin aspires to is the restoration of the Muslim Caliphate, mainly because “uniting the Muslims under one Islamic state [is] the only way for Muslims to achieve victory over their enemies\textsuperscript{18}” (in Karmon, 2006:13), and the program has already been prepared.

\section*{3.3. Restoration of the Caliphate}

The ambitious idea of restoring the Caliphate came first to Abdullah Azzam, the leader of the 1980’s jihad in Afghanistan and Bin Ladin’s former mentor. Thus, the liberation of Afghanistan was nothing but the first step to restore the Islamic empire on the vast territories from Spain to the Philippines, Central Asia, India, parts of Europe and China (Kepel, 2002: in Laqueur, 2003). Walter Laqueur likened this strategy to the

\textsuperscript{16} See for example Gause, \textit{Can Democracy Stop Terrorism} (2005)
\textsuperscript{17} Abu Musab al-Zarqawi has elaborated more on this issue in reaction to the January 2005 Iraqi elections: “The legislator who must be obeyed in democracy is man, and not God. …That is the very essence of heresy and polytheism and error, as it contradicts the bases of the faith and monotheism, and because it makes the weak, ignorant man God’s partner in His most central divine prerogative – namely, ruling and legislating ” (Quoted in Gause, 2005).
\textsuperscript{18} From the leaflet distributed in October 2005 by al-Qaeda Jihad in Palestine.
Brezhnev Doctrine, since the Soviet leader had also stated that every country that had become Communist at one time was to remain Communist forever, and akin to the Communists, who believed in the ultimate and worldwide victory of revolution, Azzam believed in the final and near victory of Islam (*Ibid*). Despite vociferous statements that if all the Muslims go to Palestine and fight for a week Palestine would be purified of Jews, Azzam was pragmatic: the export of the Islamic revolution only after the victory in Afghanistan. Al Qaeda’s strategy follows the same lines.

In his book “al-Zarqawi – al-Qaida’s Second Generation,” based on interviews and correspondence with the leaders of al Qaeda and related terrorist organizations, Jordanian journalist Fouad Hussein presented al Qaeda’s detailed plan for setting up an Islamic state, the Caliphate. The plan comprises seven stages, as follows:

- **The First Phase:** “The Awakening” – lasted from the 9/11 to the fall of Baghdad in 2003. The aim was to provoke the US into declaring war on the Islamic world and thereby “awakening” Muslims. Considered as successfully completed;

- **The Second Phase:** “Opening Eyes” – from 2005 to 2006; the aim – to make the West aware of the “Islamic community;” to transform al Qaeda into a movement; Iraq is the main center and bases will be set up in other Arabic states;

- **The Third Phase:** “Arising and Standing Up” – timeframe from 2007 to 2010; presumably, the focus will be on Syria; attacks on Turkey, Israel, and Jordan as well;

- **The Fourth Phase:** timeframe between 2010 and 2013; the aim – to bring down the hated Arabic governments; attacks against oil suppliers; cyber terrorist attack on the US economy;

- **The Fifth Phase:** timeframe between 2013 and 2016; ground prepared for the declaration of the Caliphate; the West and Israel are weakened enough not to put up serious resistance;
• **The Sixth Phase**: “Total Confrontation” – from 2016 onwards; the war between “the believers and the non-believers,” as predicted by Osama Bin Ladin;

• **The Seventh Phase**: “Definitive Victory” – ends by 2020; ultimate and undoubted success of the Caliphate.

In fact, al Qaeda is not an exceptional case in its quest. The Indonesian Jemaa Islamyya with its branches in Malaysia, the Philippines, and Singapore strives to form a regional Islamic state. The same applies to the radical Sunni Islamist insurgents of the Zarqawi group, called “neo-Salafis” or “Takfiris,” aspiring to create a Sunni puritan state in Iraq (Karmon, 2006: 5-7).

4.1. The 9/11 through the Prism of Civilizational Clash

**Why America?**

Due to its unrivalled power, Islamist terrorists tend to consider the United States the champion of the “Crusaders,” as I have already noted. “The primacy,” as Ajami has aptly noted, “begot its nemesis” (Ajami, 2001:2). Ever since his first call to holy war in 1992, Osama bin Ladin has been focusing on the US as the main culprit in the “crusader-Zionist alliance,” which occupies the Arabian peninsula, “plundering its riches, dictating its rulers, humiliating its people, terrorizing its neighbors, and turning its bases in the Peninsula into a spearhead through which to fight the neighboring Muslim peoples” (from the 1998 Fatwa). The support to Israel, occupation of the Arabian Peninsula and aggression against the Iraqi people stand out in the 1998 Fatwa as the main “crimes and sins” committed by the US. Considering Bin Ladin’s rhetoric, it is also unsurprising that religious goals are mentioned alongside other aims of the Americans.

The rationale behind the 9/11 attack merits close attention, irrespective of the extent of true motives in both pre- and post-9/11 declarations by Osama bin Ladin. The attack has certainly infused an increasing fear and anxiety in the American public, but it has not
disrupted the political and economic life of the US. Nor is such a campaign likely to destroy or significantly weaken the West, as Halliday observes (Halliday, 2005). Pulling a tiger by the whiskers, an Indian saying goes, is quite dangerous. Memories of Pearl Harbor are fresh.

The seven-stage plan of setting up the Caliphate may provide the answer: the first phase implies provoking the US to declare war against the Muslim world. But reflecting upon the crucial importance that al Qaeda attaches to possessing a fundamentalist base for the materialization of this very plan, why did Bin Ladin risk endangering the very existence of the Taliban regime – the state which most closely resembled his proposed Caliphate? Maybe he hoped to bog the US down in the Afghan quagmire, the doom that the British Empire and the Soviet Union had experienced earlier; maybe, he had overestimated the mujahedeen performance during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Whatever Bin Ladin’s motives were, that al Qaeda is weakened since the US crackdown on the Taliban is confirmed by the fact that despite repeated threats the organization was unable to carry out a devastating strike in the United States and the Western world during the whole period until the Madrid bombings in March 2004 (Karmon, 2004).

In a 2004 video tape Osama bin Ladin declared that his continued objective was to bleed America to the point of bankruptcy. While the 9/11 attack was a significant blow for the US economy it would be an extremely hard task to bankrupt the state whose $400 billion defense budget amounts to only a small percentage of its GNP. Similarly, while Bin Ladin was eloquent on the Palestinian problem in the same video, why would somebody risk destroying his power base for the sake of the issue he has largely ignored for years? If all this rhetoric and the risks Al Qaeda has taken serve the sole purpose of inflaming hundreds of millions of Muslims for a holy war – and the answer seems to be positive – then Al Qaeda is definitely keen on seeing the civilizations clash. This should be a clear warning signal not only for the Western powers but also to the governments

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19 According to Bin Ladin’s deputy Ayman al-Zawahiri “Victory for the Islamic movements against the world alliance cannot be attained unless these movements possess an Islamic base in the heart of the Arab region” (quoted in Karmon, 2006). True, Afghanistan is not located in the Arab region, but I think that substance matters more than geographic location.

20 The importance of the Stinger anti-aircraft missiles for the success of the mujahedeen should not be underestimated. As far as the difficult terrain of Afghanistan forced the Soviet military to rely on heavily armored MI-24 attack helicopters, more than 200 helicopter killings by the Stinger was perhaps the decisive factor (see for example Bearden, 2001).
and peoples in the Muslim world, since al Qaeda might attempt to turn their states into another battlefield, an intention it has already declared many times.

The 9/11 has definitely helped Osama Bin Ladin in this endeavor: his already remarkable charisma has now reached stratospheric heights in the Muslim world; all in all he “has dared to stand up to two superpowers” (Hudson, 1999). What many of his sympathizers unfortunately miss is that the main victim of Bin Ladin’s strategy of provoking the US to attack Muslim countries will be the civilian population of these very countries. Hardly a strategy of a decent leader.

**Why Those Targets?**

According to Turi Munthe, those who consider that the 9/11 was an attack on Western neo-imperialism rather than on the Western values mainly stress that had the latter been the case than attacks would have focused on Canterbury Cathedral, the Vatican or Mea Shearim rather than on the Twin Towers, the Pentagon and the White House (Munthe, 2005). Such an interpretation is not too convincing, however, since al Qaeda headship has constantly expressed the revulsion towards Western values. Moreover, aside from the religious dimension, civilizations are based on “different views of the relative importance of rights and responsibilities, liberty and authority, equality and hierarchy” (Huntington, 1993), and nobody will argue that democracy or market economy are not the fundamental values of the West. While only its masterminds know the whole symbolism they had attached to the attack, probably the best interpretation is that while the attacks had something to do with opposing American military and political might in the world, they were meant as an assault on the whole “American way of life” (Torpey, 2001). In the same light, Cohen speaks of “the swirl of hostility to the colossus, to all it embodies, and, indeed, to the very fact of its existence” (Cohen, 2004: 58).
Conclusion:

“An eye for an eye makes the whole world blind.”

Mahatma Gandhi

Like the phenomenon of terrorism, *The Clash of Civilizations* has generated numerous controversies in scholarly circles. But while many criticize the hypothesis on various grounds, al Qaeda and its masterminds seem to clearly understand the factors that have the potential to generate civilizational conflicts and are effectively employing them. From its peculiar definition of “us” and “them” to its vision of restoring the Caliphate, al Qaeda’s actions reflect the quest for such a clash. As Michael Radu of the Foreign Policy Research Institute has remarked, “many in the West deny that there is something called a clash of civilizations, but it is hard to deny such a conflict when the other side declares that it exists” (Radu, 2005).

Referring to the issue of terrorism, former secretary of Israel’s National Security Council Uzi Dayan notes that it should not be regarded as a war between civilizations, or between religions, since such an interpretation will become a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy, the main beneficiaries of which will be fundamentalist terrorists (Dayan, 2002; see also Starr, 2001, Kuttner, 2001). Unfortunately, undesirable does not mean non-existent, and in whatever way the West chooses to fight this war is another issue – al Qaeda has already started rallying supporters under the banner of civilization, and quite successfully. Moreover, I think it would be mistaken to interpret the clash of civilizations only as a classic war of battlefields between nations or groups of nations aligned along the civilizational lines: it does not really matter whether the enemy wears military uniforms of the Caliphate or the casual outfit of al Qaeda operatives. In this regard, powerful non-state actors as exemplified by al Qaeda pose an even greater threat, since unlike states – which are less likely to take too extreme steps because of the fear of retaliation – they are more prone to use WMD. One should not forget that in an interviews with TIME magazine in the beginning of 1999, Osama bin Ladin confirmed that he desired to acquire WMD. “Acquiring weapons for the defense of Muslims is a religious duty,” he stated, “It would be a sin for Muslims not to try to possess the
weapons that would prevent the infidels from inflicting harm on Muslims;” and his press spokesman Sulaiman Abu Ghaith has announced that the group aspires to kill “four million Americans, including 1 million children” (Allison, 2004). Furthermore, the emergence of the Islamist Internationale was noticed already in the beginning of the 1990’s when religious overtones exacerbated various local and national disputes in Bosnia, Albania, Kosovo, Chechnya, Dagestan and Kashmir, but that al Qaeda’s skillful use of the idea would turn it into a truly global threat was largely overlooked by many (see for example Pez, 2000).

Several scholars have noted that if Western, especially American, policies showed understanding of and respect to the interests of the people in the Muslim world, this would be a powerful remedy against terrorism (Halliday, 2005; Martín-Muñoz, 2002). While the authors may stress the moral profundity of this argument, it falls flat for at least two reasons: first, in the region fraught with numerous inter- and intrastate conflicts, it would be impossible for the US to adopt such a policy that appeases some while not alienating others; second, the interests of some governments incidentally include the destruction of the state of Israel. And as long as stereotypes of the US as “arrogant, self-indulgent, hypocritical, inattentive, and unwilling or unable in cross-cultural dialogue” (Peterson, 2002) are deeply rooted, even the most benign policies, akin to Operation Desert Storm, will be unable to fully dispel the rhetoric of diehard radicals. Good public diplomacy is urgently needed. As James Hoge has opined, “the United States must do more than set up radio and television stations to broadcast alternative views of U.S. intentions in the Middle East. It must replenish its diminished public diplomacy resources to recruit more language experts, reopen foreign libraries and cultural centers, and sponsor exchange programs” (Hoge, 2004: 6; italics mine). Among the factors with the potential to generate a positive feedback, Chuck Hagel emphasizes the importance of clarifying the US foreign policy goals for the targeted communities, quoting President Dwight D. Eisenhower: “Throughout America’s adventure in free government, our basic purposes have been to keep the peace; to foster progress in human achievement, and to enhance liberty, dignity, and integrity among people and among nations. To strive for less would be unworthy of a free and religious people” (in Hagel, 2004: 73). Such a messianic portrayal of US foreign policy, however, will surely raise many eyebrows in scholarly
circles,\textsuperscript{21} and certainly won’t win the “hearts and minds” of the Islamists. All in all, deriving from the US’ lack of credibility in the Muslim world, the success of any PR campaign will greatly depend on the cooperation on the part of powerful Muslim clergy\textsuperscript{22}.

The support of Muslim clergy is an indispensable asset in the war on terror. Since radical fundamentalists frequently use mosques and madrasahs to advance their goals, moderate clerics will certainly decimate the ranks of possible terrorist recruits by pointing to the flagrant misinterpretations of Islamic canons by al Qaeda and their like-minded. That the “great conspiracy against the Muslims” exists only in the minds of fanatics should be duly underlined too. Similarly, the blatantly biased historical references are nonsensical and broaden the rift even further, as every allusion to the Crusades or Western colonialism/imperialism will be countered with the allusion to the centuries-long subjugation of South-Eastern Europe and the Pyrenees. Few mainstream historians doubt that Europe would have been “slightly” different if not for the military brilliance of Charles Martel and Nicholas von Salm at the Battle of Tours and the Siege of Vienna respectively.

In general, demonization of the West and victimization of the Muslim world plays into the hands of religious terrorists: first, because the portrayal of terrorism as the war between belief and hypocrisy and the Good versus the Evil justifies and even necessitates violence, and second, because this gives their cause a kind of messianic charm. As Stern has explained after extensive interviews with religious terrorists, “people first join such groups to make the world a better place – at least for the particular populations they aim to serve” (Stern, 2003:29; italics mine).

Stern’s observation once again underscores the need for a complex approach to terrorism, including but not limited to psychological, political and economic aspects.

\footnotetext[21]{For example, in the same issue of the \textit{Foreign Affairs} journal, Eliot A. Cohen argues that “American claims of benign intentions to spread democracy are surely no less and no more sincere than the \textit{missions civilisatrices} of imperial powers in the past” (Cohen, 2004: 55)}

\footnotetext[22]{The oft-cited quote by the US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, “Are we capturing, killing, deterring or dissuading more terrorists every day than those clerics are deploying against us?” points that the White House understands the importance of clergy in the Muslim world. The crucial missing link, however, is the intrinsically flawed approach of treating the symptoms while leaving out the causes. As Stern et al correctly noted, “If the West continues to persecute a war on terrorism without thinking about what motivates new recruits, we will lose. We are in a race with radical clerics who are using our actions to help mobilize new recruits” (Stern et al, 2005). Unfortunately, Rumsfeld does not seem to understand that the best way to neutralize those radical clerics is to rely on their moderate counterparts.}
Huntington’s hypothesis provides useful insights for understanding the rapid ascension of Islamist terrorism, but one will surely need other analytical lenses to explain, for instance, why some white supremacists and Christian extremists have applauded al Qaeda’s goals. Where the Scriptures fail to explain behavioral patterns Marx and Freud might have better chances.

Notwithstanding some of its weaknesses, Huntington’s argument about the crucial importance of religion and values as the bedrock of civilizations is generally valid. While polls conducted in 2002 and 2003 by Zogby International and Pew Global Attitudes respectively showed that the majority in a number of Arab countries holds a favorable attitude with regards to democracy of a Western type and considers civil/personal rights as the most important political issue, the lauded “common” universalism of values is a mere illusion: the recent court trial of Abdul Rahman, an Afghan man arrested for converting from Islam to Christianity, is a crystal-example of fundamental differences over fundamental values.

Moreover, even when some values are shared on the conceptual level, this does not mean that they will be interpreted and applied in practice in a similar way; truly, the concepts of liberty and dignity might be attractive around the globe, but the argument that in fact they mean one and the same thing in the West and in the Muslim world is as fallacious as to contend that Western liberal democracy and classic Athenian democracy are identical. Even the most vociferous critics of Huntington have troubles to back their arguments with substantive empirical data. “It would be an error of historic proportions to exaggerate the incompatibility between the thought-worlds of the so-called West and the so-called Rest,” Booth and Dunne argue, stressing that “few in the rest could comprehend” the motives of mass murderers either (Booth or Dunne, 2002:7). But the authors seem to have no intention to explain why then “75 percent of people in the Middle East supported the martyr-bombings against Israel” (Ibid). Even with empirical data aside, problems of inconsistency persist on the theoretical level; Buzan, for example, on the one hand states that “culturalist approaches… that focus on ethnic or religious

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23 One of the contemporary features of Islam, according to Fukuyama, is that “it alone has repeatedly produced significant radical movements that reject not just Western policies but the most basic principle of modernity itself, that of religious tolerance… What they hate is that the state in Western societies should be dedicated to religious tolerance and pluralism, rather than to serving religious truth” (Fukuyama, 2002: 31; italics mine) – the trend that he dubbed Islamo-Fascism.
stereotypes contain the danger of validating racial and xenophobic views, and of promoting ‘clash of civilizations thinking,’” while on the other hand speaks of “the mosaic of historically rooted cultural conflicts that replaced the big ideological divisions of the Cold War” as well as about “one civilization (usually the West) trying to impose its values on others” (Buzan, 2002: 87-89; italics mine). And the strategy of depicting Huntington as an “evil prophet” whose writings further radicalize both sides in the war on terror seems to be as “promising” as to blame Muhammad just because Bin Ladin and his like-minded use the Koran to justify their cause.

A logical question arises: if fundamental values are shared by everybody – both in the realm of ideas and in practice – and there is no clash of civilizations, or such a threat is not imminent, then why do host of scholars stress the urgency of dialogue between the cultures? As Fukuyama has concluded, “culture – religious beliefs, social habits, long-standing traditions – is the last area of convergence, and also the weakest. Societies are loath to give up deeply rooted values” (Fukuyama, 2002: 29-30; italics mine).

Consequently, as long as these differences exist, many will try to exploit them for their purposes – one should not forget the historically proved effectiveness of the civilizational banner, from the age of the Crusades to the mujahedeen fighting against the Soviet “Kingdom of Evil.”

Finally, as Uzi Dayan has noted, a total victory over terrorism is impossible, but I do think that al Qaeda et al will certainly lose a good pretext and hence attract less supporters if both the West and the Muslim world learn to deal with their psychological complexes – the former with its delusion of grandeur, and the latter with its delusion of persecution.
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