

# The clash phobia

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clash of civilizations

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It is true that September 11 produced Western unity, but a prolonged response to it can produce Muslim unity. This will not be surprising in a world where 20 per cent in the West appropriate 80 per cent of the world's resources

**E**VENTS since the September 11 terrorist attack to the formation of the Afghan interim government, and, to a lesser degree, the events of the Middle East, and the recent happenings on the sub-continent, reminds one of Samuel Huntington's thesis regarding the clash of civilizations. The world is familiar with terrorist attacks since long, but when President Bush underlines the fact that the fight against terrorism will be long drawn, one suspects that the issue is not terrorism alone.

Great Britain is a member of the European Union, but it has gone an extra mile with the United States. Is that what Huntington calls the 'kinship syndrome'? Between 1980 and 1995, the US has fought 17 wars in West Asia, all against Muslims. Is that a pointer to the civilizational faultline between the West and the Islamic-Confucius world?

Prominent among those who have tried to define the substance of the post-Cold War world — at the ideological level, that is — are Francis Fukuyama and Samuel Huntington. Fukuyama is an optimist. He says, in short, that liberal democracy has won against its rivals, and that is that. Clash with other ideologies being over, we have reached the state of perpetual bliss, the rather boring "end of history".

But ideological struggle is an affair that merely spans 140 years (1850-1990). On the other hand, history, even recorded history, is five thousand years old. New ages and stages will come, as history throws up more twists and turns than any thriller, and

the rather interesting story of history will go on. Man has an unending potential for good as well as evil. The earliest one can expect the end of history is on Doomsday.

Huntington is more problematic of the two. His clash theory is more compatible with the nature of man, the perpetual sinner. He asks a valid question regarding international affairs: after the end of ideological conflict, what? If his paradigm is rejected, one will have to come up with an

alternative social construction, definition of the age, that accounts for the emerging dynamic of society.

Huntington says (Amit Gupta), firstly, that "civilization consciousness is on the rise". True. Look at the European Union in tandem with the United States, West Asia, South Asia, the Asia Pacific rim, the Confucian core (China) etc. Religion figures in civilization consciousness. Mahathir Muhammad of Malaysia argued at the 3rd Islamic Summit Conference in 1981, "all that is needed is ... to motivate our workers and entrepreneurs. [we] are enjoined to go and seek Allah's bounty when we have furnished the *sallat*. There is a share of this world for us."

Secondly, Huntington says, "conflicts between civilizations will replace ideological and state conflict". Look at the conflicts in former Yugoslavia, Palestine etc. Pakistan's love-hate relationship with India is also due to Pakistani elite's inability to

determine whether its identity is subcontinental or West Asian.

Thirdly, "conflicts between groups from different civilizations will be more violent than those between groups within civilizations". Fourthly, that "political, economic and security relations will develop within civilizations rather than across civilizations". Fifthly, that "the paramount axis of world politics will be the West and the rest". Huntington says, "... the faultlines between civilizations will be the battlelines of the future".

A sixth point can be added from the Asian perspective: modernization is not in dispute. While emerging nations are modernizing with the help from the West, they will stand up to the West as they acquire economic, military and other strength. A beleaguered West used to being lord of all it surveys, makes Huntington nervous and he alerts the West with his clash phobia.

Huntington is certainly not saying that the age of the Crusades is coming back. Nor does he imply that anthropological man is paying a return visit to the planet. 'Clash' and 'battlelines' obsess him, and he cries to slow the pace of de-weaponization in the West, but the world is surely moving away from the battlefield, or the battle-sky, to the round table of debate and dialogues.

Huntington's political paradigm is that mankind is divided into seven or eight major civilizations. Differences, among them are basic. Cultural characteristics are less easily compromised. They may converge at times, but mostly they differ. The West at the moment is faced with the danger of clash with the Islamic-Confucian faultline.

Huntington says somewhere that non-Western elites are becoming indigenized. Here is the rub. He doesn't like the idea of a Pakistani, or an Egyptian or a Cambodian correlating with his own society. He would prefer the brown *sahib*, one who is spiritually European or an American.

Huntington's West-centric view does not allow him to see facts that do not fit into his clash thesis. He ignores the Associations of South Asia



Continued on Page 2

# The clash phobia

*Dawn  
20-1-02  
clash of civil.*

Continued from Page 1

Asian Nations (ASEAN) which has successfully integrated people from four different civilizations — Islamic, Christian, Confucian and Buddhist. He argues that Japan is "unique, so it does not interact with its South East Asian neighbours". He also does not remember that Japan dare not annoy the United States by pursuing its independent policies in South East Asia.

He is alarmed at the two-digit development rate of China. He invents arguments unsupported by facts to justify his hostility towards China. He alleges that China is arming against the United States. The fact, however, is that since 1985 China has reduced its military spending from 3.6 per cent of its GNP to 3.2 per cent. It welcomes US investment and has recently become a member of the WTO.

He further alleges that China is arming the Muslim states, when the main source of their arms is still the West. The Islamic-Confucian spectre is invoked to justify increased military spending by the US, which has not reduced its military capability. Moreover, it has become the main supplier of arms to the South. Its sale in 1989 was \$34 billion; in 1991 it jumped up to \$59 billion. Huntington is more comfortable with the conservative Republicans than the relatively liberal Democrats.

Huntington has rightly pointed out that "the causes of contemporary Muslim wars lie in politics, not seventh century religious doctrines". The West is responsible for propping up backward, authoritarian regimes in oil-producing countries. The absence of democratic governments and democratic culture in most Muslim states lead many people, especially the youth, to turn for inspiration to their Islamic roots.

After the exit of the Russians, the US walked out of Afghanistan, leaving a vacuum that was filled by the Taliban (teaching school children that the earth was flat) and Osama bin Laden. In Oman, newspapers dare not write editorials. Urbanization and high birth rates have created a 'youth bulge' that provides cadres for terrorist outfits.

All Muslims, naturally, are not

terrorists. But the fact that the West is plundering their countries through pliant regimes sends an echo in every Muslim heart. It is true that September 11 produced Western unity; a prolonged response to Sept 11 could produce Muslim unity. This is not surprising when 20 per cent Westerners appropriate 80 per cent of the world's resources.

Muslim West Asia and China are two important regions of the East. But there is no Islamic-Confucian entity against the West. They agree and disagree. For instance, China recognized Israel, but that is a very touchy issue for Muslims states.

The mission of Huntington is to warn the West that in the relay race of progress, the turn of the East has come. But Asia has no designs on the West. Huntington has ignored the creative, constructive interaction and engagement, the many common values and ideals of civilizations.

The developing and the developed are reciprocal, North and South, East and West together make the whole. He has also ignored that clashes are parts of a given unity, like the clash of the head and the heart. Western civilization is built on (scientific) analysis, as one of their poets says, they "murder to dissect". The East, on the other hand, is rich in synthesis, in grasping the living whole.

Perhaps the major weakness of Huntington is that he has no social construction; he does not define the age and its specific dynamics. Civilizations and ideologies do not define historical periods. Universally accepted periods of history are the Primitive, the Slave Society, the Agricultural (Feudal in Europe) and the Industrial. Maybe, Marx over-emphasized the production of material goods, but by entirely deleting economics, all history, all evolutions will be lost.

Only the collision and convergence of civilizational, ideological and religious particles will remain. Industrial society has already passed the phase of free enterprise, of monopolies (imperialism), of multinational and trans-continental corporations, and has entered the period of globalization.

Information-based industry (also wars) is replacing labour-based industry. Industrialism is, of course, blossoming. It seems certain people rightly fear that in the period of information-based industry, the capitalists, as a classic class, will not rule the roost. Faultlines or no faultlines, capitalism will evolve into some more equitable, more humane social order. ■