

## CHAPTER IV

### THE 'CLASH OF CIVILIZATION' AND 'WAR ON TERROR'

**Interviewer:** What is your opinion about what is being said concerning your analogies and the 'Clash of Civilizations'? Your constant use and repetition of the word 'Crusade' and 'Crusader' show that you uphold this saying, the 'Clash of Civilizations'.

**Osama bin Laden:** I say there is no doubt about this. This is a very clear matter...<sup>28</sup>

The image of a 'clash of civilizations' between Islam and the West has commonly emerged. Since the "9/11" terrorist attacks and the consequent declaration of a US-led 'war on terror', the relationship between the clash of civilizations and the war on terror is still questioned. The war on terror is referring to the clash between Islam and the West since Samuel P Huntington predict would be an inevitable part of the post-Cold War world. Importantly, this confidence is as true for the leaders of the al-Qaeda network as it is for those Western policymakers.

This chapter will attempt to critique the application of 'clash of civilizations' theory to the 'war on terror', and will then seek to construct a different means of understanding and conceptualizing the 'war on terror'. It will assume that the war on terror is not in fact a clash of civilizations, but a conflict between two powerful groups of elites, for whom the clash of civilizations is an essential form of discourse. Clash of civilizations theory first came to fame in Huntington's 1993 *Foreign Affairs* article entitled 'The Clash of Civilizations?'<sup>29</sup> In it, Huntington argued that post-Cold War conflict would not be ideological or economic, but cultural. Identifying, 'seven or eight major civilizations,' he suggested that, the most important conflicts of the future will occur along the fault lines separating these civilizations from one another.

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<sup>28</sup> Michael Dunn, "Clash of Civilizations and the War on terror" *49<sup>th</sup> Parallel* 20 (Winter 2006-2007), p.1.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p.1.

The most famous statement comes when Huntington suggests a linkage between ‘Islamic civilization’ and violence: in Eurasia the great historic fault lines between civilizations are once more aflame. This is particularly true along the boundaries of the crescent-shaped Islamic bloc of nations from Africa to central Asia. Violence also occurs between Muslims, on the one hand, and Orthodox Serbs in the Balkans, Jews in Israel, Hindus in India, Buddhists in Burma and Catholics in the Philippines. Islam has bloody borders.<sup>30</sup> It seems unfair to suggest that regional conflicts such as those in Bosnia, Palestine or Kashmir are all the fault of Muslims, where Muslims are sometimes the minority and often face discrimination but in many ways this is a debatable point. What is more important is the fact that, after “9/11”, many of Huntington’s concepts and definitions such as his illustration of Islam’s ‘bloody borders’ gained new standing.

Is it surprising that many in the West see today’s ‘war on terrorism’ as the prelude to a renewed clash of civilizations. The question is in every newspaper and magazine how has the ‘clash of civilizations’ been applied to the ‘war on terror’? This question, perhaps unsurprisingly, offers a large number of Western politicians, scholars and commentators who see in the “post-9/11” world a confirmation of Huntington’s predictions. But it also shows that this link can be found in the thinking of another group, the al-Qaeda network. Huntington’s definition of ‘the civilization’ itself has influenced and shaped the rhetoric of the ‘war on terror’

Thus, ‘clash of civilizations’ expression is intertwined with the very language of the ‘war on terror’. Rumsfeld a leading advocate of US involvement in the ‘war on terror’ believed that there were just a small handful of Western nations that could be trusted not to desire the commodities and lives of others. For every instance in which President George W Bush stated that “there is no clash of

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<sup>30</sup> Dunn, p.1

civilizations, or dismissed it as ‘a passing myth of history’, one can find him stated to the need for ‘civilized people’ to unite against ‘rogue states’.<sup>31</sup>

Bush outlined his vision for the war on terror stating ‘this is civilization’s fight’. In his speech to Congress on 19 September, 2001 at the same time as the US government may have seemingly sought to avoid the notion of a clash between Islam and the West, the expression of civilizations still move quietly into its dialogue, members of the Bush administration:

The concept of clashing civilizations, then, is deeply deep-rooted in the thought structures of Western diplomats, scholars, intelligence analysts, officials and presidents. Such language points to a dangerous state of affairs it removes from the equation the possibility that Islamic militancy may have its own political and strategic aims beyond a desire to destroy our more modern, superior ‘Western civilization,’ and implies the need for all-out warfare to combat this threat. But this rhetoric cuts both ways. The implication that civilizations are at war also plays into the hands of the al-Qaeda leadership, providing an ‘us versus them’ discourse which serves to boost recruitment and commitment to the cause. What do the al-Qaeda networks have to say about the clash of civilizations? Significantly, and perhaps not surprisingly, Huntington’s book is a bestseller in the Middle East

Benjamin Barber makes his point concisely in his 2001 introduction to *Jihad vs. McWorld*: hyperbolic commentators such as Samuel Huntington have described the current divide in the world as a global clash of civilizations, and warn of a cultural war between democracy and Islam, perhaps even between the West and the rest.

‘Clash of civilizations’ thinking fails to consider. It is an important point. A radical Islamic network with its own defined policies and strategies, fighting a US-led coalition with its own policies and strategies is a very different proposition to ‘Islamic

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<sup>31</sup> Dunn, p. 2.

civilization' rising up to fight 'Western civilization'. If al-Qaeda has a clear political strategy and ideology, then, the 'war on terror' should be viewed not as a 'clash of civilizations', but as a confrontation between the leaderships of two powerful structures. Discussing the al-Qaeda attack on the US in September 2001, and the US attack on Afghanistan in October 2001, Noam Chomsky suggested that, "in both cases the crimes are considered right and just, even noble, within the doctrinal framework of the perpetrators; and in fact are justified in almost the same words"<sup>32</sup>

Thus, the 'war on terror' is reduced by those with power and influence to a narrative of 'good versus evil' that allows the central figures and ideologues of both the Bush administration and the al-Qaeda network to continue their pursuit of power and privilege. The language of the 'clash of civilizations', with its 'us and them' rhetoric, is perfect for this purpose. What is required is not a means to defend 'our civilization' against an 'Other', or to place blame at the door of US foreign policy while removing all agency from Muslims. What is needed is an alternative method of understanding the post-9/11 world, which undermines those for whom a 'clash of civilizations' is the perfect means to extend their power and influence. This is what Tariq Ali advocates in his opposition to both sides in the 'clash of fundamentalisms' arguing that, "it is necessary to oppose both and create a space in the world of Islam and the West in which freedom of thought and imagination can be defended without fear of persecution or death."<sup>33</sup>

It is also what Barber promotes in his opposition to both the all-powerful 'McWorld' and its violent by-product, 'Jihad' Barber predicted, "a war between Jihad and McWorld that cannot be won," and believes that, 'only a struggle of democracy against not solely Jihad but also against McWorld can achieve a just victory for the planet.'<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Dunn, p.6

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p.7

<sup>34</sup> Benjamin R Barber, *Jihad vs. McWorld: Terrorism's Challenge to Democracy* (London: Corgi Audlt, 2003), xv.

The ‘clash of civilizations’ and even the notion of ‘war on terror’ itself can, possibly be challenged; one is not forced to choose between lining up “with us or against us”. It is viable to challenge both of the powers engaged in their self-styled war. The rhetoric of a ‘clash of civilizations’ may suit the leadership and elite on both sides of the ‘war on terror’, by providing simple ‘us versus them’ rhetoric, The clash is not between two distinct ‘civilizations’, but between two powerful structures for which such language is beneficial. There are compelling alternatives to viewing the post-9/11 world situation as a ‘clash of civilizations’. If we embrace these, then it is possible that we might find a way to prevent both the bloodshed of terrorism, and the bloodshed of ‘war on terrorism’.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Dunn, p.8