

A Confused and Misleading Forecaster

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By Jacob Thomas

In 1996, Samuel P. Huntington, Professor of the Science of Government at Harvard University, published "The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order."* This work was an expansion of an article he had written earlier for "Foreign Affairs" Journal.

Huntington divided the world's cultures into seven current civilizations: Western, Latin American, Confucian, Japanese, Islamic, Hindu and Slavic-Orthodox. Huntington's thesis was criticized by many writers and intellectuals. I single out Thomas Friedman's critique that appeared three years later in his book, "The Lexus and the Olive Tree."** I quote from his "Opening Scene: The World is Ten Years Old."

"This book is an effort to explain how this new era of globalization became the dominant international system at the end of the twentieth century --- replacing the Cold War --- and to examine how it now shapes virtually everyone's domestic politics and international relations. In that sense, it is meant as a contribution to the body of literature that has been attempting to define the post-Cold War world. Among the most widely read of this genre are ... Francis Fukuyama's "The End of History and the Last Man" ... and Samuel P. Huntington's "The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order."

Friedman disagrees with the theses of the above mentioned works:

"Huntington tried to divine the future too much from the past and the past alone ... Huntington's view was that, with the Cold War over, we won't have the Soviets to kick around any more, so we will naturally go back to kicking the Hindus and Muslims around and them kicking us around.

"Fukuyama's pathbreaking book contained the most accurate insight about what was new --- the triumph of liberalism and free-market capitalism as the most effective way to organize a society -- but his title (more than the book itself) implied a finality to this triumph that does not jibe with the world as I find it." Pp. xvi-xviii

Fast forward to the Third Millennium, and notwithstanding all the shocking atrocities committed by Islamists in several continents, some Western scholars continue to deny the role of Islam in world terrorism.

The Wall Street Journal of 4 January, 2008, published a summary of an article in the January/February issue of FOREIGN POLICY, "Civilizations Clash, With or Without Religion." Here are excerpts, followed by my comments.

“What would the world be like without Islam? No clash of civilizations? No 9/11? No holy wars?”

“Actually, all of these events would likely have occurred, says Graham Fuller, a professor of history at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, British Columbia, and a former forecaster for the Central Intelligence Agency. Take away Islam, and the world would still be left with the main forces that drive today’s conflicts, including colonialism, cross-national ideologies, ethnic conflicts and terrorism, Mr. Fuller says.

“True, without Islam, the people of the Middle East would lack a powerful, crossborder unifying force that sometimes is co-opted by a small number of people inclined toward violence. But the Middle East would have access to similar forces, such as Marxism or ethnic nationalism, that have served that purpose in other parts of the world. In 2006, the crime-data clearing house Europol said, only one of the 498 terrorist acts in the European Union was Islamist. The rest were largely committed by separatist and left-wing groups.”

Thus far my quotations from Graham Fuller’s article in Foreign Policy.

Comments

It is evident that Professor Fuller aimed his remarks at Huntington’s thesis; specifically on those parts of his book that pointed to the Islamic propensity to be in perpetual conflict with the “Rest of the world.” For him to ask, “What would the world be like without Islam? No clash of civilizations? No 9/11? No holy wars?” and then give the following answer “Actually, all of these events would likely have occurred” is highly irresponsible. Does this former “forecaster for the Central Intelligence Agency” really know Islamic history? I doubt it. He writes from a standpoint that posits moral equivalence between Christianity and Islam.

I have commented several times in my op-ed articles on the FFI website that Islam, from its very beginnings, has been involved in violence. First against the Jews of Arabia, and then, in Islam’s far-flung conquests in Asia, Africa, and Europe. Christianity, on the other hand, was severely persecuted by the Roman authorities for 300 years; and many of its adherents died as martyrs for their faith. Furthermore, it must be emphasized that the authoritative texts of Islam, Qur’an, and Hadith, sanction war and violence against the Infidels. Muslims acknowledge the existence of “Ayat al-Sayf” (The Sword Verses) in those parts of the Qur’an that “descended” on Muhammad after he moved to Medina in 622 A.D. Later on, Muslim jurists codified the concept of violence against the “Others” by dividing the world into two distinct realms: Daru’l Islam and Daru’l Harb, (The Household of Islam and the Household of War.)

While Professor Graham Fuller wants to detach the civilizational conflicts from their religious roots, Samuel Huntington’s thesis is more convincing. In Chapter Nine of his book, Huntington wrote:

“Some Westerners, including President Bill Clinton, have argued that the West does not have problems with Islam but only with violent Islamist extremists. Fourteen hundred years of history demonstrate otherwise. The relations between Islam and Christianity, both Orthodox and Western, have often been stormy. Each has been the other’s Other. The twentieth century conflict between liberal democracy and Marxist-Leninism is only a fleeting and superficial historical phenomenon compared to the continuing and conflictual relation between Islam and Christianity. At times, peaceful coexistence has prevailed; more often the relation has been one of intense rivalry and of varying degrees of hot war.” P. 209

“The causes of this ongoing pattern of conflict lie not in transitory phenomena such as twelfth-century Christian passion or twentieth-century Muslim fundamentalism. They flow from the nature of the two religions and the civilizations based on them. Conflict was, on the one hand, a product of difference, particularly the Muslim concept of Islam as a way of life transcending and uniting religion and politics versus Western Christian concept of the separate realms of God and Caesar.” P. 110

Having quoted from Huntington’s book, I turn to the works of an expert on Islamic history, Bat Ye’or, the author of “The Decline of Eastern Christianity under Islam: from Jihad to Dhimmitude.”**** In this work, as well as in her “Islam and Dhimmitude: Where Civilizations Collide,”***** she has documented the intrinsic relationship between Islam and violence. The late Professor Jacques Ellul, of the University of Bordeaux, France, wrote about war (Jihad) as an institution in Islam, in his Foreword to “The Decline of Eastern Christianity under Islam”:

“I have greatly stressed the characteristics of this war, because there is so much talk nowadays of the tolerance and fundamental pacifism of Islam that is necessary to recall its nature, which is fundamentally warlike! Moreover, the author provides us an enlightening explanation of “Islamization,” a complex process whereby Islamicized populations supplanted peoples, civilizations, and religions in the conquered countries. This comprised two phases: amalgamation processes (massacres, slavery, and so on). The conflictive and amalgamative situations could in fact co-exist. Nevertheless, there are actually two phases: the first is war; the second is the imposition of the dhimmi status.

“These are the foundations on which were developed both the expansion of Islam and then the evolution that resulted from the relationship of this empire with the West --- an evolution that nothing could prevent and that seemed to reverse the current, since, on the one hand, the West would conquer several Islamic countries, and on the other, Western “values” would influence this world of Islam. But if some of these values (tolerance, for example) are a sort of challenge intending to prove that Islam practices them, others act in another manner to strengthen the dominant trend: nationalism, for example. But whatever the evolution, it must never be forgotten that it can only be superficial because doctrine and conduct are based on a religious foundation: even if this may seem to be weakened or modified, nevertheless what I have elsewhere called the ‘persistence of religiousness’ remains unchanged. In other words, even if the rites, structures, and customs are all that continue to exist of a once-strong religion --- today, seemingly

neglected --- these visible survivals only need a spark for everything immediately to revive, sometimes violently. And this process is described in a masterly fashion in this book. The situation that was thought to be dislocated and lapsed suddenly revives, and we are again faced with the fundamental choice: the world is still divided between the world of Islam and the world of war. And inside the umma, the only possible existence for the infidel is dhimmitude.

“This leads the author to pose the question which has become so alarming today: ‘Dhimmitude of the West?’ After having thus covered thirteen centuries of history, read in the light of this question, we reach our present situation, actually feeling its ambiguity and instability. We misunderstand this situation, for lack of a clear vision of the alternative which, whether explicit or not, existed throughout the centuries and which the present book has the immense merit to analyze rigorously. The author has the courage to examine (summarily, because this is not the purpose of the book) whether a certain number of events, structures, and situations that we know in the West do not already derive from a sort of ‘dhimmitude’ of the West vis-à-vis an Islamic world that has resumed its war and its expansion. Hostage-taking, terrorism, the destruction of Lebanese Christianity, the weakening of the Eastern Churches (not to mention the wish to destroy Israel), and conversely, Europe’s defensive reaction (antiterrorist infrastructure, the psychological impact of intellectual ‘terrorism,’ political and legal restraints regarding terrorist blackmail): all this recalls precisely the resurgence of the traditional policy of Islam. Indeed many Muslim governments try to combat the Islamist trend, but to succeed would require a total recasting of mentalities, a desacralization of jihad, a self-critical awareness of Islamic imperialism, an acceptance of the secular nature of political power and the rejection of certain Koranic dogmas....This book thus allows us to take our bearings, so as to understand more easily our present situation, as every genuine historical study should do --- without, of course, making artificial comparisons and by remembering that history does not repeat itself.” Pp. 20, 21

Having quoted these realistic analyses of the role of Islam in promoting violence across history, I conclude that the thesis of Graham Fuller is both confusing and misleading. I pity the students at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, British Columbia; they need an accurate and unbiased introduction to the history of Islam. I trust that they would consult the works of Bat Ye’or, Samuel Huntington, and other scholars who have escaped a Western Dhimmitude mindset. This is what our world desperately needs today!

* The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order, by Samuel P. Huntington. Simon and Schuster, New York, 1996

** The Lexus and the Olive Tree, by Thomas L. Friedman. Farrar, Straus, Giroux, New York, 1999

*** The Decline of Eastern Christianity under Islam: From Jihad to Dhimmitude, by Bar Ye’or. Associated University Presses, Cranbury, NJ, 1996

**** Islam and Dhimmitude: Where Civilizations Collide, by Bat Ye'or. Associated University Presses, Cranbury, NJ, 2002