

**Subject:** RE: Question about Week 5 reading list

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**Author:** [Carla LIUZZO](#)

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**Posted date:** Sunday, October 25, 2009 8:21:46 AM GMT

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**Author:** Anonymous

**Date:** Monday, October 13, 2008 2:08:38 PM BST

**Subject:** Week 5

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Hi Nick,

Hoping this isn't an inappropriate question. Having reviewed this week's extensive reading list - aside from those regarding Huntington's work - are there any titles that you would point to as essential reading?

There is a myriad to choose from this week and I'd hate to miss a curial article.

Thanks, Carla

**Subject:** RE: Question about Week 5 reading list

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**Author:** [N. Wright](#)

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**Posted date:** Tuesday, October 27, 2009 2:19:48 PM GMT

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Thanks, Carla

Hi Carla,

The short answer is no - I would try to read as many as you have time for although I notice that Sheldon has put up some good analyses of the ones he has read so far.

This is a topic which you could spend two semesters on and still not get through everything.

I would try and go for a broad approach and take in works by non-American/non-European academics and scholars. Reactions to Huntington and good and pre- and post-9/11. There is, unfortunately, never quite enough time to read everything you want to on a particular topic.

Nick

**Subject:** RE: Question about Week 5 reading list

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**Author:** [Sheldon RICHARDSON](#)

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**Posted date:** Sunday, October 25, 2009 2:37:01 PM GMT

**Last modified date:** Sunday, October 25, 2009 2:37:01 PM GMT

**Total views:** 29 **Your views:** 2

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**Author:** Anonymous

**Date:** Monday, October 13, 2008 2:08:38 PM BST

**Subject:** Week 5

Please hit the 'Reply' button to respond to this thread.

Huntington. Samuel, "The clash of civilizations", Foreign Affairs, Vol 72, no.3 summer (1993) p22.

Huntington's article was able to show how conflicts will emerge as a result of the end of the cold war. He posited the view that conflicts between civilizations will be the latest phase in the evolution of conflict in the modern world. The people and governments of non-western civilizations will no longer remain targets of colonialism, rather they would contribute significantly to the way the world will conduct its affairs.

His arguments moved away a bit from the traditional political and economic "cause and effects" and focuses on the cultural aspects that characterize these "civilizations" and how the fault lines would cause friction, resulting in civilization clashes. Factors such as history, culture and religion are important in defining these civilizations that they would not be eradicated easily. Globalisation, economic modernisation have weakened local identities as well as the nation-state as the source of identity. He also mentioned that civilization consciousness is a factor that allows civilizations to thrive, so buzzwords such as "asianization", "hinduization" and "re-islamization" explains how the non-west increase their desire to assert themselves on the world stage. Economic regionalization has also been a factor that shapes these civilizations.

These factors have been important to Huntington's theory in that he has attempted to show that these civilizations have a very real character and this character motivates those situated within to act and respond to exogenous factors at the global level. He was able to show that civilizations (and the people within) find solace in kinship ties. These ties enlarge to form brotherhoods. This commonality will then form what he dubs "the velvet curtain of culture". This new development now supplants that "iron curtain of ideology" with regards to the new dividing lines in Europe.

The main strengths that I have gleaned from this piece is the approach that he employed. He sought to incorporate the role of people and culture. He was able to demonstrate the role of religion and how it motivates and informs foreign policy. He was able to account for what he refers to as "the torn countries" and the role the hope to play on the international scene. It is my opinion that these countries suffer from an ideological identity crisis or it is a bandwagon attempt in hopes of emerging from the periphery to the semi-periphery.

The main weakness on the other hand is stark, in that he thinks that the west should maintain "military superiority,.....exploit differences and conflicts among among the confucian and islamic states, to support in other civilizations, groups sympathetic to western values and interests...to strengthen international institutions that reflect and legitimise western interests and values and to promote the involvement of non-western states in those institutions".

This would of course lead one to assume that western ideology and practise is the universal norm. While he does suggest the west should seek to develop a "profound understanding of the basic religious and philosophical assumptions...and ways in which people in these civilizations see their interests", he failed to suggest that the west could perhaps promote a more equitable involvement of non-western states in western institutions. It must be noted that these civilizations are located in the global south. Many of these civilizations feel marginalised in the global arena and are now seeking a role in international affairs. Many of these civilizations do not have much faith in western institutions, they believe these institutions are designed to keep them located in the periphery. What Huntington ought to have suggested is that international institutions should be universal as far as active involvement by the non-west and a more equitable distribution of rewards and benefits. Then perhaps the non-western civilizations would have more faith in these institutions. The "fault lines" would then be less apparent and western values would seem more attractive. So maybe what is described as a challenge to western dominance is only a reaction of the "marginalised".

what do you guys think.....?

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**Author:** [Sheldon RICHARDSON](#)

**Posted date:** Sunday, October 25, 2009 2:37:01 PM GMT

**Last modified date:** Sunday, October 25, 2009 2:37:01 PM GMT

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**Author:** [Carla LIUZZO](#)

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**Posted date:** Monday, October 26, 2009 8:24:19 AM GMT

**Last modified date:** Monday, October 26, 2009 8:29:25 AM GMT

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**Author:** Sheldon RICHARDSON

**Date:** Sunday, October 25, 2009 2:37:01 PM GMT

**Subject:** RE: Week 5

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I too agree with you Sheldon regarding the strengths of his thesis being his exploration of policy and international relations with the human element at the forefront. This seems logical but I guess prior to his work this sort of logic may have been scarcer than approaches focusing on the ideological or economic. I also very much agree with Huntington's assessment of "the world community" being perceived as meaning the "western community", true it is but from whose viewpoint? The West!!! And does that make it true for those outside of this prism of understanding?

My greatest overarching criticisms of his work:

1. He speaks of this 'Clash of Civilisations' between the West and Islam-Confucianism, but where is such a clash found? Is not the most fundamentally Islamic country on earth long and keenly supported by the United States, Saudi Arabia? Is not the largest Islamic state on earth a key regional security and trading partner of the United States and many other western countries, Indonesia? These examples go on....
2. I find Clash of Civilizations a neo-orientalist 'Us vs. Them' thesis which really does nothing to aid in

advancing IR because it seeks to overstress difference, to promote the West as the only benchmark for community and the global norm, I would argue its premise is misguided.

3. Huntington's work employs extraordinary generalisations, he over-simplifies the subject, and he groups very different countries and peoples together undermining the complexities of human development. For instance 'Islamic bloc', there is not even a common language here, there is a plethora of difference between Syria and Pakistan, Iran and Qatar etc one could sit all day and find many differences between countries, tribes, identities of the Islamic world.
4. As Sheldon alluded to the whole premise of the article appears to be the replacement of the Cold War enemy with another 'enemy' it seems to keep the West in a war-like state.

I very much enjoy the work of Edward Said on this topic, he delivered a talk to the University of Massachusetts some time ago, and the transcript should be available online. I will post some particular quotes.

Looking forward to reading and adding more, Carla

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**Author:** [Sheldon RICHARDSON](#)

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**Posted date:** Monday, October 26, 2009 10:22:58 PM GMT

**Last modified date:** Monday, October 26, 2009 10:22:58 PM GMT

**Total views:** 20 **Your views:** 2

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**Author:** Carla LIUZZO

**Date:** Monday, October 26, 2009 8:29:25 AM GMT

**Subject:** RE: Week 5

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Hi carla, point #3 I think is very interesting. He really does oversimplify the subject, i understand what he was trying to achieve but it is indeed a sweeping generalisation. I didnt really think of that..... thanks.

**Subject:** RE: Week 5

: RE: Week 5

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**Author:** [P. WOJTAS](#)

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**Posted date:** Wednesday, October 28, 2009 9:01:22 PM  
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**Last modified date:** Wednesday, October 28, 2009 9:01:22  
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**Total views:** 22 **Your views:** 2

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I would also be in agreement with your argument on mutual cooperation, which has been in existence for some time now. More often than not, the popular oversimplifications on cooperation between the West and Islam countries prevail. On more complex inspection, one is in a position to see how profound these oversimplifications are. We live in a global era where states pursue their interests by means of both covert and overt partnerships in order to maximize the chances of completion. It is prerogative to comprehend that the globalization requires mutual support, which might reach beyond both the Western and Islam-based civilizations.

In addition, the strong position on religion is a bit too far-fetched a judgment. Of course, there are differences in terms of approach towards faith and the social perception. Nonetheless, one must again take into consideration the world and reality one lives in, which means that one must recognize the fact that the 21<sup>st</sup> century is becoming more and more borderless and faith or religion, do not play such a vital part any more. The point of view will not inhibit or obstruct smooth economic, didactic or trade-related collaboration. The world is based upon a plethora of knotted dealings where only full cooperation irrespective of race, denomination or citizenship might be victorious. Of course, all the above will not apply to “rogue” states or groups which regardless of their origin will strive to adversely affect “inter-faith” and borderless cooperation.

Pawel

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**Author:** [P. WOJTAS](#)

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**Posted date:** Wednesday, October 28, 2009 9:03:41 PM  
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hello,

Just to clarify, my previous post pertains to Carla's post.

Sorry for the confusion.

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**Author:** [Sheldon RICHARDSON](#)

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**Posted date:** Sunday, October 25, 2009 4:51:24 PM GMT

**Last modified date:** Sunday, October 25, 2009 4:51:24 PM GMT

**Total views:** 21 **Your views:** 2

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**Author:** Anonymous

**Date:** Monday, October 13, 2008 2:08:38 PM BST

**Subject:** Week 5

Please hit the 'Reply' button to respond to this thread.

Hadar, L. "What green peril?" [Foreign policy](#), spring (1993).

This article by Hadar basically shows the west's obsession with Islam is perhaps a bit exaggerated. He basically showed at the end of the cold war, framers of security policy in the US began beholding Islam as a potential threat to western interests. The islaamic conspiracy theory was fueled by isolated events and trends. Countries like Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Israel, Turkey, Pakistan, India and old communist regimes of central asia joined in the quest to contain the "green monster". Interestingly , all of these countries were concerned about their strategic value to the US, since the cold war has ended.

These governments and lobby organisations used leaks, misinformation, and media spins to help create a new middle east danger. The media also helped in constructing a view of islam that is somewhat dangerously homogenous and misleading. He was able to illustrate that far from being a unified power threatening western dominance, islam is fighting against militant anti-muslim fundamentalism. He also mentioned that "the most militant and sucessful islamic fundamentalist offensive has been led by the US. Hadar was able to show how a disunited region could result in political finger pointing, which resulted in the establishment of a common denominator (Iran). This view differs from Huntington's thesis on civilizations and their somewhat homogenous nature which enables them to assert themselves on the international scene.

Hadar articulated how wrong it is to assume homogenity in the muslim world. he was i fact able to show the courtship of interests of the states in the middle east and that of the US. He argued that the US have turned a blind eye to the abuses of Saudia Arabia and Israel, mobilised support for pro-western autocratic regimes and by extension securing US hegemony in the region. Hadar argued that the Us should engage in a poolicy of constructive disengagement in the region and allow Japan and Europe to start taking care of its interests there. This would help to create a new and independent balance of power systems and security arragements. The US should be an honest broker in the region, help Israel make peace with its neighbours. This integration would stimulate development and contribute to a stable middle east. The US should not in the name of democracy , niether through aid or military support assist autocratic rule. This would force such countries to reform.

Hadar's article showed that the green peril was merely a smoke screen to hide the real issue at hand. The issue was the excuse for US foriegn policy to be constructed and granted "legitimate " means to intervene in the middle east to secure its interests, hegemonic and energy. He was able to show that the muslim world is not united, neither is it a real threat to western dominance. Rather he showed how the "divide and conquer " rule was applied to the region. US foreign policy capitalised on the threat of the "green monster" which was lubricated by the parochial concerns of individual nieghbouring states. This was presented fertile conditions for US interests in the region to be firmly established.

thoughts anyone....?

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**Author:** [Sheldon RICHARDSON](#)

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**Posted date:** Monday, October 26, 2009 10:07:24 PM GMT

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**Author:** Anonymous

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Ayoob, Mohammed. "The future of Political Islam: the importance of external variables". International Affairs, 81 (2005) p 951.

Ayoob's work was able to re-define what is meant by "Political Islam". He mentioned that is no "one" political Islam, rather the term exists in the plural. Political Islam is varied and are subject to the different cultures and political thought and expression in each individual context. The reason for the error of the meaning of the term "political Islam" as a sweeping generalisation is because of the use of religious idioms that are employed in rhetoric. Ayoob re-enforced the point that even though different political entities may use muslim idiomatic, these must not be taken contextually with respect to the specific cultures.

Since Islamists are not homogenous, the west would be very inaccurate to imply that it is that way. Ayoob makes it clear that it is in fact the west who are responsible for shaping the wrong view of Islamic political thought, its motives and political agenda. If one were to carefully scrutinize the political objectives and actions of the various Islamist formations, it would be realised that they are discrete national agendas that are being sought as opposed to a singular universal project. Al-Qaeda has unfortunately been seen by the west as the singular Islamist voice and political effort, when it is in fact a fringe organisation operating outside of traditional Islamic thought.

Ayoob mentioned that Islamism is a political ideology and not a theological construct. It provides answers to their political and social predicaments. It is a product of modernity as well as a response to it. He mentioned that even though the most repressive states can frustrate secular movements for political reform, political Islam can exploit these situations relying on language to promote information dressed as religious discourse. Likewise, in the case of muslim governments who may be socially neglecting their populace, such societies are fertile for Islamist groups to emerge and fill the gap of assisting their brethren. This can be a force for creating awareness for reform and mobility for change. This presents staying power for Islamists in the face of state oppression. Ayoob as well Hadar asserts that as long as authoritarian regimes persist, Islamism as an ideology will continue to thrive.

This article showed that is the western international system and US foreign policy, being tilted against muslim countries, created a situation in which politically minded muslims have become keenly aware of their

situation. The foreign policy of the US during the cold war, military occupation of Iraq, unflinching support for Israel, support for regimes like Mubarak in Egypt and Saddam Hussien in Iraq in the 80's have alienated the muslim world. The double standards that the US have adopted has demonstrated a gross disrespect to the minds of people in these regions. These policies are no doubt neo-colonial and are designed to keep the region underdeveloped and accessible for US interests. These policies provide fertile ground for the politically minded and the use of reform rhetoric of Islamism which can be misunderstood by western audiences as the harmful and militant "Political Islam".

Political Islamists will continue to exist as discrete, culturally specific rhetoric and movement. It will continue to be a reaction to neo-colonial western forces and policies that persist to be overlords impeding equitable development in the region. The trouble is that alongside these groups, the extremists on the fringe will always want to make their presence felt as well. My gleaning from this reading is that Political Islam as far as the west is concerned is the "green peril" (Hadar), a monolithic entity poised to threaten western values and democracy, a construct that they themselves have created. Islamism on the other hand is heterogenous reality, evolved contextually with respect to their individual situations, agents for political discourse and change, reacting to exogenous forces that they feel threaten their development as a people.

What do you guys (and Nick) think?.....

**Subject:** RE: Week 5

**Subject:** Back and impressed

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**Author:** [N. Wright](#)

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**Posted date:** Tuesday, October 27, 2009 2:14:05 PM GMT

**Last modified date:** Tuesday, October 27, 2009 2:14:05 PM GMT

**Total views:** 13 **Your views:** 2

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**Author:** Anonymous

**Date:** Monday, October 13, 2008 2:08:38 PM BST

**Subject:** Week 5

Please hit the 'Reply' button to respond to this thread.

Dear All,

Just to let you know that I am back and once again able to respond to questions/queries etc.

I was very gratified to return and find so many postings for last week's and this week's reading discussions. There seems even to have been a little controversy (you wait till I go away for that!).

Anyway, I will read through these properly today and tomorrow and post some thoughts, so don't feel I'm ignoring you.

In the meantime I hope you're getting on okay with the next e-tivity and enjoying this week's discussion topic.

Best,

Nick

**Subject:** Back and impressed

**Subject:** RE: Week 5

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**Author:** Kevin GALALAE

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**Posted date:** Wednesday, October 28, 2009 5:14:37 AM  
GMT

**Last modified date:** Wednesday, October 28, 2009 5:14:37  
AM GMT

**Total views:** 27 **Your views:** 6

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**Author:** Anonymous

**Date:** Monday, October 13, 2008 2:08:38 PM BST

**Subject:** Week 5

Please hit the 'Reply' button to respond to this thread.

This is my attempt to answer this week's guiding question: **What are the principal strengths and weaknesses of Huntington's "The Clash of Civilizations"?**

The principal merit of Huntington's thesis is the recognition that in the future the nation states' dwindling importance and authority will result in conflict between civilizations along the fault lines that separate people's cultural and religious identities. Given that he formulated this theory in 1992, nearly 10 years prior to 9/11 and the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, one can only applaud him for his clairvoyance. We can argue ad infinitum that the West's clash with the Islamic world is not fundamentally a civilizational conflict, that it is the result of a fringe fundamentalist cross-section of the Islamic world, that modernity and secularism are stronger than fundamentalism and traditionalism (Fouad Ajami), that people do not have singular but multiple affiliations and thus are unlikely to clash along cultural lines (Amartya Sen), that there are no distinct cultural boundaries and as such no real but only imagined fault lines (Paul Berman), that cultures are dynamically interdependent and in constant interaction and therefore more in harmony with one another than at odds (Edward Said), and that Islam and Christianity clash only when they are "misconstrued or manipulated for political or ideological ends" (Pope John Paul II), but that would be tantamount to refusing to see the forest for the tree, since none of the above arguments can explain why there is so much hatred and animosity between the West and the Islamic world and why the two are willing to kill each other with abandon, be it in Chechnya, Bosnia, Afghanistan, Iraq, or the slew of terrorist attacks and guided missile retributions since 9/11.

Yes, civilizations are curious about one another – tourism is not without reason the world's

biggest industry; people want to know and experience other cultures and this, along with affluence and mass transportation, is gradually leading to the erosion of stark cultural differences and to the homogenization and syncretisation of cultures and peoples. As such, one can argue that civilizations are becoming increasingly alike, that their differences are being eliminated and that more peace and not more conflict await us in the intercivilizational future. But that is not as simple as that. There are forces of resistance to this cultural hybridization and Huntington has astutely identified the demarcation lines between the different camps of cultural thought and values. Those who are willing to kill and die to preserve their cultural identities or dignity are in a minority, thank God, but by no means are they on the fringe and certainly not without broad popular support. And because they are a minority they will try to overcome their marginalization with violence, as it is happening everywhere. Huntington's main thesis, therefore, cannot be discounted; however much we want to discount it because it portends some scary scenarios. It is only by taking it seriously that we can avoid exacerbating the real and present danger of intercivilizational conflict.

A global culture is emerging and its catalysts are the perils that await us all if we don't learn to coexist globally: climate change and the environmental catastrophe it portends, global industrialization and the fossil fuel and natural resources depletion it will lead to; south-north wealth and income imbalances and the political destabilization and mass migration they will cause. When the above render regions poorer and people desperate, the fighting will occur between religions, cultures and ethnicities, not within. And those are the faultlines Huntington has warned us about.

The principal weaknesses of Huntington's theory are: (1) that he places too much emphasis on cultural and religious considerations while ignoring economic, environmental and political considerations, which, if history is any indication, are often the leading causes of conflict; (2) that no Confucian-Islamic connection has yet materialized and is unlikely to; and (3) that some of his advice on how the West ought to mitigate, in the short-term, the oncoming dangers of intercivilizational war are more likely to inflame rather than extinguish such potential conflicts.

Kevin

**Subject:** RE: Week 5

**Subject:** RE: Week 5

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**Author:** [Lory MADONNA](#)

**Posted date:** Wednesday, October 28, 2009 10:01:26 PM GMT

**Last modified date:** Wednesday, October 28, 2009 10:01:26 PM GMT

**Total views:** 20 **Your views:** 4

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**Subject:** RE: Week 5

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Kevin

Hi Kevin,

I read your statement on Huntington's thesis and as Nick, I found it thought provoking and indeed provocative.

I'd like to add two things which I believe represent some of the weaknesses in Huntington's argument:

First:

If one thinks of Huntington's article "clash of civilisations?" written in 1992 and then at 9/11, one can perceive Huntington's thesis as a sensational prediction for the future.

However, the nature of his writing is as sensationalist as speculative. Despite the hypothesis appears to have predicted 9/11 nearly 10 years prior to terrorist attack against the United States, it cannot be falsified by empirical analysis of the past.

The end of the cold war has offered grounds for many speculations. It is important to consider that each level of analysis provide us with a specific view and understanding of events. This understanding will therefore be limited; by stressing some elements of the world, our analysis will necessarily disregard features and information that can only other levels of analysis can provide.

The international political environment is made of complex domestic and international forces and Huntington's hypothesis seems over simplified to be able to provide a robust framework to describe, investigate factors that determine conflicts in the international arena.

Second:

There is no agreement among scholars over the definitions of civilisation and Huntington does not make a tangible contribution to the debate.

I find Immanuel Wallenstein's view of civilisation as 'contemporary claim about the past in terms of its use in the present to justify heritage, separateness, rights' of particular interest.

**Subject:** RE: Week 5

**Subject:** RE: Week 5

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**Author:** [N. Wright](#)

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**Posted date:** Thursday, October 29, 2009 8:37:45 AM GMT

**Last modified date:** Thursday, October 29, 2009 8:37:45 AM GMT

**Total views:** 13 **Your views:** 3

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**Author:** Lory MADONNA

**Date:** Wednesday, October 28, 2009 10:01:26 PM GMT

**Subject:** RE: Week 5

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Hi Lory,

I hadn't come across that quote from Wallenstein before and it seems very apt. Thank you!

Nick

**Subject:** RE: Week 5

**Subject:** Some thoughts on Huntingdon

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**Author:** [N. Wright](#)

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**Posted date:** Wednesday, October 28, 2009 9:21:20 AM  
GMT

**Last modified date:** Wednesday, October 28, 2009 9:21:20  
AM GMT

**Total views:** 33 **Your views:** 2

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**Author:** Anonymous

**Date:** Monday, October 13, 2008 2:08:38 PM BST

**Subject:** Week 5

Please hit the 'Reply' button to respond to this thread.

Dear All,

Good morning and hope this finds you well and intellectually fighting-fit.

I found Kevin's analysis and argument above thought-provoking and provocative - which made it an excellent accompaniment to my coffee.

He makes a strong case for agreeing with Huntingdon's approach which has the advantage - if we can call it that - of offering a systematic (if extremely bleak) structure for analysing many of the problems of international relations. But (and you probably won't be surprised there is a but), I have serious problems with this approach which I will try and argue as succinctly as possible below.

1. ***The danger of over-arching approaches*** - we must beware of these in international relations; whilst searching for systems or forms of analysis that can explain/account for everything we conveniently miss the small details - and the myriad differences - that exist in each set of conflicts, tensions etc between different states (large and small) around the world.

A case in point from today's news: the turmoil in Pakistan - we can present this through the prism of "clash of civilisations", but this fails to account for the enormous social and economic problems that have beset the country since its foundation, the historical tensions with India, the difficulty of pacifying border regions that

have never been meaningfully brought under the rule of law etc etc etc.

We should therefore be wary of the "siren call" of big, over-arching structures of analysis.

2. ***The danger of a binary world*** - leading directly from this is the risk of seeing everything in binary - a "them" and "us" approach which appeals to fundamentalists on both sides, whether of a religious persuasion or of a necon persuasion. The world is not black and white - it is countless shades of grey. People at the level of grassroots see things in terms of whether they have food and water, shelter for their families, whether they are receiving fair treatment from local or national authorities etc. Sure, their problems can be re-presented to them in terms of how it is the "fault of the West" or the "fault of Islam" - but these are slogans that don't actually offer anything more than a superficial analysis.

3. ***What are culture and civilisation?*** - I don't recall Huntingdon explaining these to my satisfaction. They are so difficult to pin down is so wrapped up in alternative explanations of identity and memory (both national and local) - look at the current debates over "Britishness" in the UK for example. We should therefore be extremely careful of using these as the basis for any kind of long-term, large-scale analysis.

Huntingdon satisfies the needs of a particular world view. This is not to say that it is "wrong" (although I personally disagree with it) - only that we should be aware of the difficulties inherent in his thesis before we subscribe to it.

I welcome your thoughts on this.

Best,

Nick

**Subject:** Some thoughts on Huntingdon

**Subject:** RE: Some thoughts on Huntingdon

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**Author:** [P. WOJTAS](#)

**Posted date:** Wednesday, October 28, 2009 10:46:09 PM GMT

**Last modified date:** Wednesday, October 28, 2009 10:46:09 PM GMT

**Total views:** 23 **Your views:** 2

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**Author:** N. Wright

**Date:** Wednesday, October 28, 2009 9:21:20 AM GMT

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Nick

I have decided to reply to your post as I find it very interesting. Among others, I have found one of your comments particularly thought-provoking. The binary world observation I have in mind. Huntington in his hypothesis drew a clear picture of West and the rest. As I wrote in my response to Carla's comments I do not subscribe to that point of view at all. It is extremely tricky to describe who "us" is and who "them" is. Would I perceive my neighbour of the same religion but of different origin my "friend or foe"?

First of all, that sort of perception as you rightly stated reinforces ethnic and national tensions and rifts; thus ought to be rejected immediately. It is quite trivial to say that world is not black and white, however, as far as this topic is concerned it could not be more true. I must admit I am slightly concerned about this West-rest division as it only strengthens the mistaken line of reasoning.

The 21<sup>st</sup> century reality is that we all seem to live in the world which is based upon mutual interests, collective pursuit of the objectives, economic complexity and international systems. Who is West? Who is the rest? Who is to make that division? Who needs it? I firmly believe that such a binary perception is incorrect. Nowadays, when people travel, work abroad and study abroad the above division is somewhat untrue. Of course, the roots and the

basis of the civilisations shall stay separate however people of different origin, background or denomination will live side by side, will run business together, will seek their potential to gain prosperity and I do not think that origin, background or faith will have a great impact upon their choices.

Pawel

**Subject:** RE: Some thoughts on Huntingdon

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**Author:** [N. Wright](#)

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**Posted date:** Thursday, October 29, 2009 8:36:29 AM GMT

**Last modified date:** Thursday, October 29, 2009 8:36:29 AM GMT

**Total views:** 22 **Your views:** 2

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**Author:** P. WOJTAS

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Pawel

Hi Pawel - you make some good points.

What then do you think is the appeal of the approach that Huntington offers? He makes some quite persuasive arguments, after all.

Thoughts?

Nick

**Subject:** RE: Some thoughts on Huntington

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**Author:** [Carla LIUZZO](#)

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**Posted date:** Thursday, October 29, 2009 9:35:42 AM GMT

**Last modified date:** Thursday, October 29, 2009 9:40:17 AM GMT

**Total views:** 19 **Your views:** 2

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**Author:** N. Wright

**Date:** Thursday, October 29, 2009 8:36:29 AM GMT

**Subject:** RE: Some thoughts on Huntington

Hi Pawel - you make some good points.

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Thoughts?

Nick

Hi Nick, Hi Pawel,

I found ***Challenging Huntington*** by Rubenstein and Crocker very engaging and in my view it does go some of the way to explaining the appeal of Huntington's work.

Human nature is always keen to know the future, in Huntington's work there was a method of predicting future strife. We've explored this week the limitations of such a simplistic approach and as you put it Nick 'overarching' (I found that to be a good description). But I think this was some of the attraction of the work. As Rubenstein and Crocker argue there was a 'theoretical vacancy' left by the Cold War. Huntington gave a pithy and logical paradigm which, as I outlined in an earlier post, put the human (culture) at the centre. This fit well with the global tone of the time. However as Rubenstein and Crocker outline the fundamentals of Huntington's theory does remain consistent with common models in IR i.e. political realism. So though it was received as a departure from tradition (or new way of looking at IR) this is a debatable notion. The authors surmise "the logical implication, then [Cold War] and now, was not merely that the 'other' was different but that he was inferior". This I find to be a very apt explanation of the tone of Huntington's entire essay and also can explain why it was appealing to some.

Some other thoughts on this article.....

We've already discussed at length the fact that Huntington's work assumes modern civilisations are homogenous nations sharing cultural values but something I found interesting about Rubenstein and



Crocker's work is they go a step further in explaining Huntington's neglect of the idea that 'Westernism is as much an ideological construct as communism or the free world' and as such could behave as tightly or as loosely under pressure. The authors argue that Huntington's assumption that Western countries will not conflict with each other because they share a 'civilisation' is flawed.

I particularly enjoyed the chapter called 'basic human needs' which discussed Pan-nationalist militancy explaining it as 'a response to political subordination, cultural humiliation and blocked economic development' I could not help but consider Afghanistan when reading this.

I concurred completely with the concluding remarks of the article which spoke of a humankind's ability to avert and resolve conflict (in contrast to Huntington's almost ipso facto pessimism of culture and clashes). The greatest challenge for humans is a 'failure to transform the systems of inequality that make social life around the globe a struggle for individual survival – systems that feed the illusion that either one civilisation or another must be dominant'. This sits much more to the point to my mind.

Carla

**Subject:** RE: Some thoughts on Huntingdon

**Subject:** RE: Some thoughts on Huntingdon

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**Author:** [N. Wright](#)

**Posted date:** Thursday, October 29, 2009 10:20:17 AM GMT

**Last modified date:** Thursday, October 29, 2009 10:20:17 AM GMT

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Carla

Hi Carla,

You wrote: "[The authors argue that Huntington's assumption that Western countries will not conflict with each other because they share a 'civilisation' is flawed](#)".

You only have to look at the splits over the Iraq War, disputes over trade and disagreements over how to deal with climate change to see this to be true. Conflict after all is played out in a variety of ways that are not always military.

Nick

**Subject:** RE: Some thoughts on Huntingdon

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**Author:** [Ekim BIREROGLU](#)

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**Posted date:** Thursday, October 29, 2009 2:41:06 PM GMT

**Last modified date:** Thursday, October 29, 2009 2:41:06 PM GMT

**Total views:** 22 **Your views:** 2

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**Author:** N. Wright

**Date:** Thursday, October 29, 2009 10:20:17 AM GMT

**Subject:** RE: Some thoughts on Huntingdon

Hi Carla,

You wrote: "[The authors argue that Huntington's assumption that Western countries will not conflict with each other because they share a 'civilisation' is flawed](#)".

You only have to look at the splits over the Iraq War, disputes over trade and disagreements over how to deal with climate change to see this to be true. Conflict after all is played out in a variety of ways that are not always military.

Nick

On Samuel Huntington's 'Clash of Civilizations'

I must admit when I first read it my first reaction was not a positive one as I find Huntington's world view to be somewhat narrow. In addition to this he does not provide sufficient definitions on some very complex concepts. Therefore I agree with both Nick's and Lory's assessment that his analysis is to simplistic when the world that we live in is so complex.

I don't think distinct cultural boundaries exist in the present day. The rise of fundamentalism whether it be **Neocons** trying to legitimize certain politics or Islamic fundamentalism as a direct consequence of perceived injustice, which ever one it is has its roots in economic political disillusionment rather than cultural difference in my opinion.

I mean how one can justify Clash of Civilization when the US has alliances with Islamic countries in the Middle East not to mention Saudi Arabia the heart land of Islam. If one wants to ignore this and just look at the US relationship with Iran to justify Huntington's argument one could, but this would nevertheless be a highly selective thing to do.

Another thing on culture, I am half Turkish/half Syrian Swede. Whenever I go to Turkey or Syria (which should be against the West if we take Huntington's argument) all I see is the popularity of Western culture, in peoples choices of clothes, music etc. When it comes to discussing politics people might disagree with US foreign policy but so does people in the West.

Conflict arises when there is clash of economic, political interest not out of cultural differences. Just look at **Islamic** Iran's relationship with (**Christian/ Socialist**) Venezuela or another example was when in 1999 **Muslims** in Kosovo asked (**Christian** US) for help against the **Christian** Serbs and the list goes on so I am going to stop here.

E

**Subject:** RE: Some thoughts on Huntingdon

**Subject:** RE: Some thoughts on Huntingdon

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**Author:** [N. Wright](#)

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**Posted date:** Thursday, October 29, 2009 4:33:40 PM GMT

**Last modified date:** Thursday, October 29, 2009 4:33:40 PM GMT

**Total views:** 17 **Your views:** 2

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**Author:** Ekim BIREROGLU

**Date:** Thursday, October 29, 2009 2:41:06 PM GMT

**Subject:** RE: Some thoughts on Huntingdon

On Samuel Huntington's 'Clash of Civilizations'

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E

Hi Ekim - plenty of good points in there. So, the same question I posed to Pawel: what do you think the appeal of Huntington is? He certainly seems to attract a lot of positive reaction in some political quarters.

Nick

**Subject:** RE: Some thoughts on Huntington

**Subject:** RE: Some thoughts on Huntington

[Reply](#) [Quote](#) [Set Flag](#)

**Author:** [Ekim BIREROGLU](#)

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**Posted date:** Thursday, October 29, 2009 5:38:44 PM GMT

**Last modified date:** Thursday, October 29, 2009 5:38:44 PM GMT

**Total views:** 22 **Your views:** 2

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**Author:** N. Wright

**Date:** Thursday, October 29, 2009 4:33:40 PM GMT

**Subject:** RE: Some thoughts on Huntington

Hi Ekim - plenty of good points in there. So, the same question I posed to Pawel: what do you think the appeal of

Huntingdon is? He certainly seems to attract a lot of positive reaction in some political quarters.

Nick

Hi Nick

I guess one argument for Huntington's appeal in some political quarters is that he attempts to provide justifications for continuing to expand the Cold War by other means.

What do you guys think?

E

**Subject:** RE: Some thoughts on Huntingdon

**Subject:** RE: Some thoughts on Huntingdon (reply)

[Reply](#) [Quote](#) [Set Flag](#)

**Author:** [P. WOJTAS](#)

**Posted date:** Friday, October 30, 2009 3:49:37 PM GMT

**Last modified date:** Friday, October 30, 2009 3:49:37 PM GMT

**Total views:** 11 **Your views:** 2

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**Author:** N. Wright

**Date:** Thursday, October 29, 2009 8:36:29 AM GMT

**Subject:** RE: Some thoughts on Huntingdon

Hi Pawel - you make some good points.

What then do you think is the appeal of the approach that Huntington offers? He makes some quite persuasive arguments, after all.

Thoughts?

Nick

Hello,

Although, I must admit I am not a great enthusiast of Huntington's hypothesis, on reading his article I found three aspects which would be worth closer consideration. Firstly, his approach seems to bring in-depth values of religion, origin and background-based perception to the attention. From that perspective it is worthwhile to remember that always behind the actions there are people and their choices which derive from their ethnic, economic or religious backbone. As far as this human aspect is concerned, it is good to bear in mind that

politics is not forever a dirty game of the few but predominantly it is a game which thrives on people and their embedded values.

Secondly, Huntington aptly points out how so called “torn” countries might play a part in IR. States which are found to be “melting pots” and which are still in the process of building their social, economic and military entity and a sense of direction will be of crucial importance for the West and for the East. Turkey, Russia or Mexico where culture, history and ethnic variety are of great magnitude will have to come to certain conclusions and make a choice. As far as Turkey is concerned, it appears to be happening at the moment and the direction seems to be quite obvious. As to Russia, it is not so much apparent, though. The great legacy of the USSR and the history of the dominant state are not an easy pill to swallow and Russian elites and people seem to have a problem with that. Therefore, they still have some time to ponder over the path they are going to take. Nevertheless, the West must acknowledge all the above issues and try to appreciate that cultural differences cannot be eradicated overnight.

The issue of cultural differences brings us to the last point I would like to present as a valid one. Huntington claims “It will also, however, require the West to develop a more profound understanding of the basic religious and philosophical assumptions underlying other civilizations and the ways in which people in those civilizations see their interests. It will require an effort to identify elements of commonality between Western and other civilizations.” I suppose this stance on long term relationships with the non-West countries appears to be absolutely crucial. In my estimation, not only do the West need to implement the above position to run effective policy with others, but should do it simply because such a standpoint based upon mutual development and understanding of basic reasons will undeniably simplify the relations; by mutual comprehension states will be in a position to combine forces and as a result, Huntington’s daunting visualization may turn out to be implausible.

Pawel

**Subject:** RE: Some thoughts on Huntington (reply)

**Subject:** RE: Some thoughts on Huntington

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**Author:** [Sean LAWRENCE](#)

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**Posted date:** Thursday, October 29, 2009 8:31:50 PM GMT

**Last modified date:** Thursday, October 29, 2009 8:31:50 PM GMT

**Total views:** 15 **Your views:** 2

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**Author:** N. Wright

**Date:** Wednesday, October 28, 2009 9:21:20 AM GMT

**Subject:** Some thoughts on Huntingdon

Dear All,

Good morning and hope this finds you well and intellectually fighting-fit.

I found Kevin's analysis and argument above thought-provoking and provocative - which made it an excellent accompaniment to my coffee.

He makes a strong case for agreeing with Huntingdon's approach which has the advantage - if we can call it that - of offering a systematic (if extremely bleak) structure for analysing many of the problems of international relations. But (and you probably won't be surprised there is a but), I have serious problems with this approach which I will try and argue as succinctly as possible below.

1. **The danger of over-arching approaches** - we must beware of these in international relations; whilst searching for systems or forms of analysis that can explain/account for everything we conveniently miss the small details - and the myriad differences - that exist in each set of conflicts, tensions etc between different states (large and small) around the world.

A case in point from today's news: the turmoil in Pakistan - we can present this through the prism of "clash of civilisations", but this fails to account for the enormous social and economic problems that have beset the country since its foundation, the historical tensions with India, the difficulty of pacifying border regions that have never been meaningfully brought under the rule of law etc etc etc.

We should therefore be wary of the "siren call" of big, over-arching structures of analysis.

2. **The danger of a binary world** - leading directly from this is the risk of seeing everything in binary - a "them" and "us" approach which appeals to fundamentalists on both sides, whether of a religious persuasion or of a neocon persuasion. The world is not black and white - it is countless shades of grey. People at the level of grassroots see things in terms of whether they have food and water, shelter for their families, whether they are receiving fair treatment from local or national authorities etc. Sure, their problems can be re-presented to them in terms of how it is the "fault of the West" or the "fault of Islam" - but these are slogans that don't actually offer anything more than a superficial analysis.

3. **What are culture and civilisation?** - I don't recall Huntingdon explaining these to my satisfaction. They are so difficult to pin down is so wrapped up in alternative explanations of identity and memory (both national and local) - look at the current debates over "Britishness" in the UK for example. We should therefore be extremely careful of using these as the basis for any kind of long-term, large-scale analysis.

Huntingdon satisfies the needs of a particular world view. This is not to say that it is "wrong" (although I personally disagree with it) - only that we should be aware of the difficulties inherent in his thesis before we subscribe to it.

I welcome your thoughts on this.

Best,

Nick

I have been reading everyone's comments, and I must say they are very deep and insightful.

From my estimation, Huntington's article ["The Clash of Civilizations"] has some merits, especially concerning future wars. Let us view Huntington's article from a religious perspective: Monotheism [Judaism, Christianity and Islam to be specific] within the context of IR and future clashes



cannot be down played. In fact, it forms a strong basis of the "Rest" and the "West" relations, and within the "West" and Rest" themselves; Palestinians not recognizing the right of Israel to exist, for example. One has to be cognizant that "Islam is not just a religion [as with other monotheistic faith], and certainly not just a fundamentalist political movement. It is a civilization, and a way of life that varies from one Muslim country to another...." Huntington points to the reality that cultural differences along with differences of religious convictions make compromising less fluid. Civilization differences are deeply rooted and form the subjective view in which the world is observed.

However, on the other side of the coin, Huntington's analysis is flawed: he assumes homogeneity regarding both the Islamic world, and the West. In fact, as Nick pointed out "You only have to look at the splits over the Iraq War, disputes over trade and disagreements over how to deal with climate..." in relations to the West. Moreover, Huntington has overlooked the "tenacity of modernity and secularism in places that acquired these ways against great odds". His views were narrowed through the lenses of a traditionalist perspective; as a matter of fact, "men want Sony, not soil". The latter was reinforced by Ekim's point regarding the popularity of western culture in Turkey and Syria, for example.

From what I have gathered thus far, Huntington's analysis ["The Clash of Civilizations"], though it holds some strong merits, are subjective and of a westernized view.

Sean

**Subject:** RE: Some thoughts on Huntington

**Subject:** RE: Week 5

[Reply](#) [Quote](#) [Set Flag](#)

**Author:** [P. WOJTAS](#)

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**Posted date:** Wednesday, October 28, 2009 3:05:24 PM GMT

**Last modified date:** Wednesday, October 28, 2009 3:05:24 PM GMT

**Total views:** 23 **Your views:** 2

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**Author:** Anonymous

**Date:** Monday, October 13, 2008 2:08:38 PM BST

**Subject:** Week 5

Please hit the 'Reply' button to respond to this thread.

Hello,

Let me start off with saying how interesting a coincidence it is that currently during half-term I am in Turkey so I can combine theoretical, academic approach to Islam and a first-hand traveller's experience. To the point, though.

1. What are the principal strengths and weaknesses of Huntington's 'The Clash of Civilizations'?

In my opinion the predominant weakness is the lack of belief in people and their fruitful coexistence. I am aware that I might sound romantic but I am a true believer in inner qualities which make people human beings and allow them to live side by side. Secondly, the world is becoming more and more globalised and the fact that somebody is a Muslim, Catholic or Orthodox seem to be of a lesser importance than it used to be. Modern economy is based upon mutual cooperation and dignity. People travel, run businesses and undertake educational challenges abroad. The message I am trying to convey is that I cannot see why the world will have to be the "West against the rest" when both West and the rest wish to pursue the happiness and work in partnership to become increasingly affluent. We must remember that today's reality comprises of a web of intertwined connections between the rest and the West

2. What are the principal divisions between Islam and the West?

I suppose there have been thousands of books written on the subject and probably thousands are still to be written as there is so much to write about. Nevertheless, I have prepared a brief list of the most, in my humble opinion, obvious aspects.

- ✓ General perception of roles within the society
- ✓ Approach towards faith, religion
- ✓ Economy-based divisions. West transpires to be more affluent whereas non-Western countries tend to be working toward a certain level of military and economic reliable stability
- ✓ West occurs to be in the lead in terms of utilizing its power and affluence regarding legitimizing its objectives by means of a dominant position in international organizations

- ✓ Military proliferation approach
- ✓ History, believes and rudimentary culture-related values seem play a part as far as divisions are concerned.

1. What is the central argument contained in *The Clash of Civilizations*?

Huntington claims that the future of the mankind heavily depends upon the coexistence among civilisations. He states that a majority of the conflicts will take place where the civilizations will clash. The conflicts will not be based on ideology or economy; they shall be evoked by culture. Furthermore, according to Huntington, such conflicts will be the most violent ones and will bring the greatest degree of suffering and bloodshed.

2. Is the Islamic world united?

In my opinion, it is difficult to assume that that is the case. As far as western civilization is concerned, one might be clearly in a position to ascertain that the US and the EU countries play a dominant role. With regards to Islamic world, I would personally not dare to put forth such an assumption. More importantly, I suppose, Islamic world is yet to amalgamate its relations. The process of becoming more important has not finished yet in Islamic world, therefore it is difficult to talk about unified Islamic world. Having read Huntington's hypothesis, one must bear in mind that countries such as Turkey or Russia are still in the process of building their social, sociological and economic identity. The author presented them as " torn " countries which are yet to sort out the array of the internal issues to attain a level of social, religious and economic equilibrium.

3. Who leads the Islamic world?

This is a very interesting issue. I do not think that clear leaders have emerged as yet. Nonetheless, one must not underestimate countries who are currently striving to attain more dominant role in their geo-political vicinity. If one is taking Confucian-Islamic connections into consideration such leaders clarify themselves by definition. China, India, and Pakistan – they all possess nuclear forces; thus one may surmise these countries will take the lead.

Pawel

**Subject:** RE: Week 5

**Subject:** Looking beyond Huntingdon

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**Author:** [N. Wright](#)

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**Posted date:** Thursday, October 29, 2009 9:42:40 PM GMT

**Last modified date:** Thursday, October 29, 2009 9:48:11 PM GMT

**Total views:** 24 **Your views:** 4

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**Author:** Anonymous

**Date:** Monday, October 13, 2008 2:08:38 PM BST

**Subject:** Week 5

Please hit the 'Reply' button to respond to this thread.

Dear All,

There seems to be a consensus forming that Huntingdon's "clash of civilisations" does not provide a satisfactory explanation or framework of the state of relations between what we call the "West" and the "Islamic World". We also seem to agree that both of these are to a major extent artificial constructs that are highly subjective in what they mean and infer.

It is interesting, though, that we persist in seeking labels to apply to the different concepts, issues, challenges, peoples, cultures etc that we encounter within international relations. I think it was Timothy Garton Ash who wrote that it was symptomatic of our need to bring some degree of order (and indeed simplicity) to an otherwise extremely complex world in which classification and organisation present significant challenges. So we must be cautious in how we apply these terms.

To move the discussion forward, we have 9/11 and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan as the key "events" in contemporary western-Islamic relations (although again I use these labels advisedly). We also live in a world that is increasingly interdependent, whatever the fundamentalists on all sides may wish.

What therefore are the alternatives to Huntingdon? And what are the challenges facing what we consider the Islamic world? Given the "difficult" history of the west's involvement in the Islamic world, what role does it have to play - if any - in helping overcome these challenges?

There are some questions for you to ponder and I look forward to your responses.

Best,

Nick

**Subject:** Looking beyond Huntingdon

**Subject:** RE: Looking beyond Huntingdon

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**Author:** Kevin GALALAE

**Posted date:** Friday, October 30, 2009 3:32:11 AM GMT

**Last modified date:** Friday, October 30, 2009 3:32:11 AM GMT

**Total views:** 17 **Your views:** 4

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**Author:** N. Wright

**Date:** Thursday, October 29, 2009 9:48:11 PM GMT

**Subject:** Looking beyond Huntingdon

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Nick

Nick,

Here is my attempt to answer your questions:

**What therefore are the alternatives to Huntingdon?**

Building a truly inclusive and democratic transnational polity where dialogue between nations and civilizations is free and fair.

**And what are the challenges facing what we consider the Islamic world?**

1. Separating religion from the state or, alternatively, making Islamism work as a socio-political institution capable of governing states.
2. Creating jobs and economic opportunities for their young and growing populations or, alternatively, instituting policies to control population growth (But what are the chances of that happening in a world dominated by patriarchal values and traditional norms?)
3. Reconciling modernity with traditional values, which can only occur if Muslims countries succeed in weakening the hold that Islam has on society.

**Given the "difficult" history of the west's involvement in the Islamic world, what role does it have to play - if any - in helping overcome these challenges?**

As I have stated in my reply to Ali last week, the West should help the Islamic world form a pan-Islamic confederation along the lines of the European Union in order to facilitate their aspirations for economic, social and political integration. The focus of Western involvement in the region should therefore shift from economic self-interest to peaceful coexistence.

Kevin

**Subject:** RE: Looking beyond Huntingdon

**Subject:** RE: Looking beyond Huntingdon

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**Author:** [Carla LIUZZO](#)

**Posted date:** Friday, October 30, 2009 9:18:54 AM GMT

**Last modified date:** Friday, October 30, 2009 9:18:54 AM GMT

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**Author:** Kevin GALALAE

**Date:** Friday, October 30, 2009 3:32:11 AM GMT

**Subject:** RE: Looking beyond Huntingdon

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Kevin

### What therefore are the alternatives to Huntington?

Kevin's succinct alternative above (while it could be argued ignores the realpolitik in our international system) does accurately explain the alternative to Huntington's paradigm.

### And what are the challenges facing what we consider the Islamic world?

I think it helpful to break down this into some of the major sectors of this 'world' because I think there are varying challenges. These are just some that spring to mind.

#### Some overarching issues:

- Education standards across the board. Of greatest challenge is complimenting a system of rote learning (Qu'ranic schooling) with problem solving, planning and job specific skills
- The Palestinian/Israeli state. I subscribe to the thoughts of Graham Fuller and others which maintain that essentially the Palestinian/Israeli conflict is NOT rooted in Islam i.e. that it would still be in existence even if Palestine was majority Christian (or any other religion for that matter). I do however believe that faith in God is now one of the banners uniting/highlighting the Palestinian struggle. "Peoples who resist foreign oppressors seek banners to propagate and glorify the cause of their struggle. The international class struggle for justice provides a good rallying point. Nationalism is even better. But religion provides the best one of all". To this point the increased presence of Islamist rhetoric has increased ten-fold in the past 10 years and has now provided a point of cohesiveness. Contrary to common perception though in the annual Arab Public Opinion Survey 2009 being a Muslim rated less importantly than being a citizen of



own country across six Arab countries.

- Islamic identity, what brand of Islam to pursue?
- Extremism - Overcoming issues of indoctrination by extremist elements, particularly in countries where believers are illiterate or where Arabic (the language of the Qu'ran) is not spoken. Afghanistan and some parts of Indonesia are good examples here
- Secularism – maintaining secularism in countries like Turkey is under some pressure

#### Resource driven developing countries (GCC):

- Maintaining and adapting a cultural identity and engaging a national workforce
- Streamlining trade between the cooperation
- Improving human rights (labour laws, corruption, racism, freedom of speech)
- Transparency in government and national strategy

#### The Arab World:

- Education (as above)
- Employment (the highest unemployment rates in the world, deplorable youth unemployment)
- Politically repressive regimes who fear change and who obstruct social justice and democracy. Examples like Iran, Palestine, Lebanon all reveal a desire of these populations to participate in elections and have their voice heard but in cases the leadership undermine the process to maintain power.
- The instruments of Government. The authoritarian nature of Arab governance extends to the civil service, the bureaucracy and functionality of the country making change, transparency and justice very difficult.
- Arab unity. The inability of Arab states to work together to form cohesive statements or to set trade, economic or political direction is inhibiting development. The Arabs are united on one thing and that is that they want to be in charge of their own affairs free from intervention however the Arab League is proving an ineffective and loose affiliation which cannot manage even a united statement on the invasion of Gaza. There are bold rivalries among monarchs and dictators (historical given the fact some of these men have been in power for three decades).

**Given the "difficult" history of the west's involvement in the Islamic world, what role does it have to play - if any - in helping overcome these challenges?** The perception that countries in the West have an imperialist agenda and are seeking to control some Arab and Muslim countries is a legitimate and deep seeded one. To overcome this requires building trust between parties and improving the transparency of these relations. There is also a strong perception of double-standards and real inconsistencies with how America and others treat their international partners. The 'us' and 'them' approach is very much at play in the Arab and Muslim world and poses a huge challenge.

It is my opinion that if the "West" truly wants to address the division with the "Islamic World" the agenda of respect that Obama is pursuing must be legitimate and must be followed by actions. I want to say I don't disagree with what Kevin is arguing for when he says "the West should help the Islamic world form a pan-Islamic confederation along the lines of the European Union in order to facilitate their aspirations for economic, social and political integration". I do however strongly believe that it is this sort of action that continues on a path of trying to impose change on others. I believe this will be met with scepticism and a feeling that again the West doesn't understand the nuances of the Arab World and seeks to change it to become something which it is not.

I strongly advocate a path which is already well underway albeit quietly. Separate to the issue of Israel (which demands its very own space in this debate). This is a path of truly standing by Obama when he says that "America does not presume to know what is best for everyone". This could manifest itself in the following a) becoming more aware of progress, in its various forms b) building trust in relations before offering Western style 'solutions' to perceived Arab and Muslim problems c) allowing the private sector and globalisation to

breach cultural boundaries as a matter of development (there are some great examples of private sector and NGO work which is serving interests at a political level. I've done work here in Qatar with American Ivy League universities which have set up campuses here (improving tertiary education levels AND providing American style values in education = serving many interests) The Tribeca Film Festival (A New York establishment) is currently underway here and is doing some impressive - yet subtle things for censorship and freedom of speech. d) partnering rather than always being seen as wanting to lead.

There have been cases recently of successful brokering of issues in the Arab and Muslim world which have been carried out by Arabs and Muslims themselves. I am thinking of Lebanon last year when Qatar brought all the parties together in Doha and nipped out a solution and an end to violence (some may say temporary but what isn't in the complexity that is Lebanon?) This was a triumph for the Qataris who felt empowered, and for the Arabs who felt for once they had been left alone to deal with a problem and who had solved it. It could be argued that this sort of action (and there are other cases) has not been acknowledged nearly enough by the West. There are signs of change to be seen everywhere. The Iranian elections recently and the spilling over of protest against results, the Egyptian push to have Hosni Mubarak's son taken out of the running in the upcoming elections. These are all signs that point toward what the West should deem as progress and what should be watched and applauded (minus the patronising manner).

My point is this, and I would argue against this being a generalisation; there are some very fundamental issues which underline perceptions of the 'West' in this part of the world and many of them stem from a feeling that Arabs and Muslims are not respected and are not given their rights in the international arena. These must be addressed, there will be minimal progress while one side feels grossly misunderstood, undervalued and underestimated. In this matter I do agree with Huntington that the fault lines and 'great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural'.

Carla

**Subject:** RE: Looking beyond Huntington

**Subject:** RE: Looking beyond Huntington

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**Author:** [P. WOJTAS](#)

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**Posted date:** Saturday, October 31, 2009 9:55:12 PM GMT

**Last modified date:** Saturday, October 31, 2009 9:55:12 PM GMT

**Total views:** 11 **Your views:** 2

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**Author:** N. Wright

**Date:** Thursday, October 29, 2009 9:48:11 PM GMT

**Subject:** Looking beyond Huntington

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Nick

What are the challenges facing what we consider the Islamic world?

I suppose the main challenge will be to coexist peacefully. I must stress at the beginning that the use of word "peacefully" is deliberate and by doing so I do not mean military connotation. As I stated in my previous posts, I am not a great fan of Huntington's stance and so I do not anticipate great military clashes. I consider coexistence more in economic, financial, educational and trade terms. I suppose all these will soon play or even are already playing a vital part in the relations between the civilizations. Nowadays, when "the money makes the world go round", such cooperation is indispensable, which means that both parties will need to work towards mutual understanding. We need to differentiate between the countries; though as different challenges will be facing Iraq, Turkey or Saudi Arabia. Thus, one must not take a broad view and use the Islamic World as a term encompassing the same desires and objectives. Of course, countries which find themselves in economic and political difficulty will need to work towards social, financial and political stability. Developing countries will need to find the way to harmonize the social, financial and political approaches. As to more developed states, it will be vital to cooperate more with their poorer "neighbours" and promote positive collaboration in order to help increase standards with regards to economy, social liberties and generally speaking the standard of life, which in turn, will be very conducive to peaceful coexistence and positive approach to non-Islamic countries. Wealthier countries of the region will undeniably have to set a good example and act as "role-models" to promote the merits of political stability, financial liquidity and social consistency.

Given the "difficult" history of the west's involvement in the Islamic world, what role does it have to play - if any - in helping overcome these challenges?

The question of whether the West is to play a part in overcoming the differences is, to my mind, quite simple. I truly believe "there are two to tango". It should be prerogative for the West to assist the East in the undertaken changes. If the West seeks valid opportunities, the West must provide necessary assistance. I suppose the Western civilisation could begin with, at least, making some effort to comprehend the most basic pillars of the Eastern civilisation. I suppose, it is crucial to abandon the idea of

the binary division. Both “players” must work in partnership to overcome the difficult issues. The West will be required to act in very practical terms. Moreover, overt and realistic support for social liberties development, political stability, and economic constancy will be desirable. If the changes are to be overcome, the process will require practical sustainability based upon factual determination from both sides.

**Subject:** RE: Looking beyond Huntingdon

**Subject:** RE: The principal divisions between Islam and the West

[Reply](#) [Quote](#) [Set Flag](#)

**Author:** Kevin GALALAE

**Posted date:** Friday, October 30, 2009 3:07:46 AM GMT

**Last modified date:** Friday, October 30, 2009 3:07:46 AM GMT

**Total views:** 24 **Your views:** 4

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**Author:** Anonymous

**Date:** Monday, October 13, 2008 2:08:38 PM BST

**Subject:** Week 5

Please hit the 'Reply' button to respond to this thread.

I see the principal divisions between Islam and the West as being the following:

1. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict and America’s use of Israel as a bridgehead inside the Islamic world (see *Islam and the West: Annual Report on the State of Dialogue*, published by the World Economic Forum Community of West and Islam Dialogue at [http://www.weforum.org/pdf/C100/Islam\\_West.pdf](http://www.weforum.org/pdf/C100/Islam_West.pdf).)
2. Oil and who controls it
3. The West’s ongoing attempt to maintain hegemony over the Islamic world, which feed Western policies of intervention that sustain client regimes and which run counter to Western rhetoric about democracy and freedom
4. Heavy American military presence on Arab soil (see Chalmers Johnson’s *The Sorrows of Empire* on this subject)
5. Personal status issues such as divorce, abortion, gender equality, and gay rights, on which the Islamic world holds traditional views while the West is liberal (see World Values Survey at [www.worldvaluessurvey.org/](http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/) for data on this subject)

Kevin

**Subject:** RE: The principal divisions between Islam and the West

**Subject:** RE: The principal divisions between Islam and the West

[Reply](#) [Quote](#) [Set Flag](#)

**Author:** [N. Wright](#)

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**Posted date:** Friday, October 30, 2009 9:00:07 AM

GMT

**Last modified date:** Friday, October 30, 2009 9:00:07

AM GMT

**Total views:** 19 **Your views:** 4

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**Author:** Kevin GALALAE

**Date:** Friday, October 30, 2009 3:07:46 AM GMT

**Subject:** RE: The principal divisions between Islam and the West

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Kevin

Dear Kevin,

You offer a familiar list of issues, and the first four are difficult to challenge. However, I would take serious issues with the fifth for similar reasons to those I set out in my earlier response to your analysis of

Huntingdon's thesis.

You wrote: "[Personal status issues such as divorce, abortion, gender equality, and gay rights, on which the Islamic world holds traditional views while the West is liberal.](#)"

We must be extremely careful about using all-encompassing language such as this. It presents the Islamic world and the West as homogenous and ignores the huge differences in attitudes and opinions within these groupings. There are uncountable numbers of people and groups within different Islamic countries who would, for example, disagree with you regarding gender equality, gay rights etc - for a flavour of this concerning Iraq see a book written by one of my former lecturers Nicola Pratt entitled *What Kind of Liberation? Women and the Occupation of Iraq*. Equally, consider the influence of more conservative opinion on such issues most notably in the USA (whose most recent ex-President, lest we forget, was a committed social conservative), and nearer to home in Spain and Poland to offer just 2 examples.

There are influential elites on both sides of the Islam - non-Islam/Christian divide (again these labels come with a health warning) for whom such cultural divisions serve the important purpose of reinforcing notions of division and separation. But they should by no means be considered to be universally held.

Best,

Nick

**Subject:** RE: The principal divisions between Islam and the West

**Subject:** RE: The principal divisions between Islam and the West

[Reply](#) [Quote](#) [Set Flag](#)

**Author:** Kevin GALALAE

**Posted date:** Friday, October 30, 2009 1:07:11 PM GMT

**Last modified date:** Friday, October 30, 2009 1:07:11 PM GMT

**Total views:** 16 **Your views:** 3

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**Date:** Friday, October 30, 2009 9:00:07 AM GMT

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Best,

Nick

Hi Nick,

I understand why the last point engenders suspicions of skewed thinking on my part, but I was merely presenting the results of the World Values Surveys, which speak far more eloquently of people's values in that part of the world than I could infer from my distant perspective. After all, if we cannot rely on empirical data to come to understand complex issue than what can we rely on?

By no means would I try to present a homogenous view of the Islamic world, but brevity imposes limitations on how far we can elaborate in any single answer. By and large, the overall data shows unequivocally that the Islamic world is far more conservative on the issues I have mentioned than the Western world. And I say this with the caveat that there are countless instances where this conclusion could be turned upside down depending on the country, region, etc.

I believe that avoiding spelling out issues that are uncomfortable is far more dangerous than not doing so if dialogue between civilizations, cultures and nations is to be fruitful. Often times, I have noticed with horror here in the West, that the concern of not giving offence acts as censorship. This too, by the way, may be a cultural difference between nations and peoples who like being direct and others who like being indirect. To this end, I wish to quote Karen Armstrong, who is perhaps the most prolific and insightful writer on the intricacies of the Muslim world. She wrote "Dialogue must not degenerate into a cosy colloquy between like-minded people."

I apologize for keeping this answer shorter than I would have liked to, but we are all sick with the H1N1 virus here.

Kevin

**Subject:** RE: The principal divisions between Islam and the West

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[Reply](#) [Quote](#) [Set Flag](#)

**Author:** [N. Wright](#)

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**Posted date:** Friday, October 30, 2009 2:01:22 PM GMT

**Last modified date:** Friday, October 30, 2009 2:01:22 PM GMT

**Total views:** 13 **Your views:** 3

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Hope you have a speedy recovery and thanks for all the great postings.

Nick

**Subject:** RE: The principal divisions between Islam and the West

**Subject:** RE: The principal divisions between Islam and the West

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**Author:** Kevin GALALAE  
**Posted date:** Friday, October 30, 2009 3:44:45 PM GMT  
**Last modified date:** Friday, October 30, 2009 3:44:45 PM GMT  
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**Author:** N. Wright  
**Date:** Friday, October 30, 2009 2:01:22 PM GMT  
**Subject:** RE: The principal divisions between Islam and the West

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Nick

Thsnk you, Nick.

While my son and I are doing well, my wife has contracted the illness too and she is pregnant. By the way, one of the symptoms of the H1N1 infection is irritability, so let me know if I start going off the rails. I may not know it.

Considering that I am Romanian, and we Romanians are a passionate lot, this along with the swine flu is an incendiary combination. Even though I have immigrated when I was a child, the cultural and even genetic heritage I have inherited is here to stay and I often find myself completely at odds with common opinion here in Canada and even more so with common opinion in the States. This goes to show you that whther we define culture or not, it is real and it sets us apart in deepseated and subtle ways. That is the beauty and challenge of consensus, bridging those differences.

Kevin

**Subject:** RE: The principal divisions between Islam and the West

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**Author:** [Sean LAWRENCE](#)  
**Posted date:** Friday, October 30, 2009 9:39:53 PM GMT  
**Last modified date:** Friday, October 30, 2009 9:39:53 PM GMT  
**Total views:** 13 **Your views:** 3

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**Date:** Friday, October 30, 2009 3:07:46 AM GMT

**Subject:** RE: The principal divisions between Islam and the West

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Kevin

Hi Kevin, I am sorry to hear about you and your family illness, I hope you all recover soon.

The principal divisions between Islam and the West have its roots in cultural differences. Cultural differences fuel states' interests [economic and political]. This brings us to cultural determinism as a major determining factor of nations' economic and political arrangements. Though modernity is at an all time high, national identity remains at the fore front for both Islamic and Western states. In fact, the conduct of any IR is interest based. Fouad Ajami [*The Summoning*] said it best: "nations cheat: they juggle identities and interests. Their ways meander" [6]. The latter, as the ole' folks exclaimed during trying times, "for peace sakes!"

Sean

**Subject:** RE: The principal divisions between Islam and the West

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**Author:** Kevin GALALAE

**Posted date:** Saturday, October 31, 2009 12:30:04 AM GMT

**Last modified date:** Saturday, October 31, 2009 12:30:04 AM GMT

**Total views:** 16 **Your views:** 4

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Sean

Thank you for your well wishes, Sean.

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Twenty years later, I was travelling around the world and in Brazil I came across a Hungarian front desk clerk in the hotel I was staying in. The moment we identified ourselves as being Romanian and Hungarian we smiled and behaved with the warmth of long lost friends. We had so much in common and in each other we found a bit of home. The same experience was repeated many times over, actually every time I encountered Hungarians around the world and here in Canada where I have been living for the past 24 years.

Having immigrated twice, travelled around the world thrice, visited nearly 100 countries, and speaking 6 languages to various degrees of incompetence, I can tell you that the world is a tapestry of cultures and civilizations. Yes, they all intersect. Yes, they all have more in common than not. Yes, people have ingrained beliefs and values that are the result of cultural conditioning. Yes, it is difficult to bridge those differences when coexisting and when cultures that rub shoulders have developed animosities that are fed by group feelings. But when individuals are taken out of those contexts, they will always seek commonalities when interacting with others. I contend that the stronger group animosities are, the harder individuals try to bypass them. This nobility of spirit tells me that human beings are at their best when free of the distorting influence of their cultural conditioning.

I make my living, to a great extent, as an intercultural consultant, and I have learned to navigate my way through the treacherous waters of many a culture. From experience, I know that when peoples of different

cultures meet to do business or not, they must be frank with one another and tolerant. Sincerity and tolerance are equally necessary; one cannot stand without the other without giving rise to misunderstandings and dire consequences further down the road.

Such is the complexity of cultures, peoples and civilizations; and thus easy the way to bridge our differences.

What keeps the Islamic and the Western world apart is the abject lack of sincerity that characterizes their interaction. The Islamic world scores higher than the Western world in terms of sincerity but abysmally lower in terms of tolerance; conversely, the Western world is great at tolerance but terrible on sincerity.

That is the essential element of their troubled relationship.

I thought it necessary to share this because until now I have been speaking in generalities and, as a result, I have come under criticism for making broad statements. Of course, one could again accuse me of having made a sweeping generalization, but that is unavoidable unless I go on to qualify every statement and then qualify the qualifications I have made on every statement. Which brings me to a point I made in a different posting; there is nothing we cannot discuss or we should not discuss because it may lead to conflict – as long as we are sincere and tolerant.

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**Subject:** RE: The principal divisions between Islam and the West

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**Author:** [Sean LAWRENCE](#)

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**Posted date:** Saturday, October 31, 2009 5:05:57 AM GMT

**Last modified date:** Saturday, October 31, 2009 5:05:57 AM GMT

**Total views:** 17 **Your views:** 2

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**Author:** Kevin GALALAE

**Date:** Saturday, October 31, 2009 12:30:04 AM GMT

**Subject:** RE: The principal divisions between Islam and the West

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Hi Kevin

I pulled this statement from your last posting, because I couldn't agree with you more. This is a major difference you pointed out.

Sean

**Subject:** RE: The principal divisions between Islam and the West

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[Reply](#) [Quote](#) [Set Flag](#)

**Author:** [N. Wright](#)

**Posted date:** Saturday, October 31, 2009 9:01:42 AM GMT

**Last modified date:** Saturday, October 31, 2009 9:01:42 AM GMT

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**Author:** Sean LAWRENCE

**Date:** Saturday, October 31, 2009 5:05:57 AM GMT

**Subject:** RE: The principal divisions between Islam and the West

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Sean

Hi Sean - I have just commented on the same extract from Kevin's posting. Like you I found it a great coda to our discussions this week.

Best,

Nick

**Subject:** RE: The principal divisions between Islam and the West

**Subject:** RE: The principal divisions between Islam and the West

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**Author:** [Sheldon RICHARDSON](#)

**Posted date:** Saturday, October 31, 2009 12:02:52 PM GMT

**Last modified date:** Saturday, October 31, 2009 12:02:52 PM GMT

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**Author:** Sean LAWRENCE

**Date:** Saturday, October 31, 2009 5:05:57 AM GMT

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Sean

Hi, I think this is a very interesting point, i never looked at it in this way before and it is so true. That is indeed a major difference.

**Subject:** RE: The principal divisions between Islam and the West

**Subject:** RE: The principal divisions between Islam and the West

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**Author:** Kevin GALALAE

**Posted date:** Saturday, October 31, 2009 1:51:26 PM GMT

**Last modified date:** Saturday, October 31, 2009 1:51:26 PM GMT

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Sean

Hi Sean,

The fact that both you and Nick have found the same words meaningful goes to show that wisdom acquired through personal experience is the most valuable kind. That is why, I contend, the two worlds under discussion here will find harmony or at least concord only through greater interaction. We must rub shoulders and live with one another until we learn to accept each others' follies. It appears that, whether we like it or not, many European countries will be 25% Muslim by 2025.

Kevin

**Subject:** RE: The principal divisions between Islam and the West

**Subject:** RE: The principal divisions between Islam and the West

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**Author:** [N. Wright](#)

**Posted date:** Saturday, October 31, 2009 8:59:55 AM GMT

**Last modified date:** Saturday, October 31, 2009 8:59:55 AM GMT

**Total views:** 14 **Your views:** 3

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**Author:** Kevin GALALAE

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I make my living, to a great extent, as an intercultural consultant, and I have learned to navigate my way through the treacherous waters of many a culture. From experience, I know that when peoples of different cultures meet to do business or not, they must be frank with one another and tolerant. Sincerity and tolerance are equally necessary; one cannot stand without the other without giving rise to misunderstandings and dire consequences further down the road.

Such is the complexity of cultures, peoples and civilizations; and thus easy the way to bridge our differences.

What keeps the Islamic and the Western world apart is the abject lack of sincerity that characterizes their interaction. The Islamic world scores higher than the Western world in terms of sincerity but abysmally lower in terms of tolerance; conversely, the Western world is great at tolerance but terrible on sincerity.

That is the essential element of their troubled relationship.

I thought it necessary to share this because until now I have been speaking in generalities and, as a result, I have come under criticism for making broad statements. Of course, one could again accuse me of having made a sweeping generalization, but that is unavoidable unless I go on to qualify every statement and then qualify the qualifications I have made on every statement. Which brings me to a point I made in a different posting; there is nothing we cannot discuss or we should not discuss because it may lead to conflict – as long as we are sincere and tolerant.

Kevin

Hi Kevin,

Thank you for a really interesting posting - I find your experiences fascinating. What particularly struck me was this:

[What keeps the Islamic and the Western world apart is the abject lack of sincerity that characterizes their interaction. The Islamic world scores higher than the Western world in terms of sincerity but abysmally lower in terms of tolerance; conversely, the Western world is great at tolerance but terrible on sincerity. That is the essential element of their troubled relationship.](#)

I think you have touched on something that goes to the core of the relationship, and certainly struck a chord with me.

I am reminded of a phrase that I think either Timothy Garton Ash or Michael Ignatieff used in reference to the wars in the Balkans in the 1990s. He talked about the **narcissism of small differences** - i.e. how we seek to emphasise the often tiny things that distinguish us from neighbouring people(s) rather than the things that unite us.



Anyway, I think we've covered some very interesting ground this week - and get better soon!

Nick

**Subject:** RE: The principal divisions between Islam and the West

**Subject:** RE: The principal divisions between Islam and the West

[Reply](#) [Quote](#) [Set Flag](#)

**Author:** Kevin GALALAE

**Posted date:** Saturday, October 31, 2009 1:39:17 PM GMT

**Last modified date:** Saturday, October 31, 2009 1:39:17 PM GMT

**Total views:** 16 **Your views:** 4

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**Author:** N. Wright

**Date:** Saturday, October 31, 2009 8:59:55 AM GMT

**Subject:** RE: The principal divisions between Islam and the West

Hi Kevin,

Thank you for a really interesting posting - I find your experiences fascinating. What particularly struck me was this:

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Anyway, I think we've covered some very interesting ground this week - and get better soon!

Nick

Hi Nick and all,

"**The narcissism of small differences**", that is so painfully true. Now I know how to encapsulate my private experiences with the cultures and peoples I have encountered.

Thank you, Nick.

Kevin

**Subject:** RE: The principal divisions between Islam and the West

[Reply](#) [Quote](#) [Set Flag](#)

**Subject:** Wrapping up Week 5

[Reply](#) [Quote](#) [Set Flag](#)

**Author:** [N. Wright](#)

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**Posted date:** Sunday, November 1, 2009 9:04:12 PM GMT  
**Last modified date:** Sunday, November 1, 2009 9:04:12 PM GMT  
**Total views:** 13 **Your views:** 3

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**Author:** Kevin GALALAE  
**Date:** Saturday, October 31, 2009 1:39:17 PM GMT  
**Subject:** RE: The principal divisions between Islam and the West

Hi Nick and all,

"The narcissism of small differences", that is so painfully true. Now I know how to encapsulate my private experiences with the cultures and peoples I have encountered.

Thank you, Nick.

Kevin

Dear All,

This week's discussion has been extremely interesting and I hope you feel you have all managed to get quite deep into what is a challenging topic.

I think we have a consensus about the need to be wary of labels - or at least to understand how loaded phrases like "Islamic world" and "western civilisation" can be. As scholars of international relations it behoves us particularly to be responsible with our use of language, and I think this has been very much in evidence this week, particularly as this week's topic was framed in terms that could easily have lead to an emphasis on division.

What has stood out for me has been how often the notion of interdependence has been flagged up as a determining factor in the relationship between "the West" and the "Islamic World".

Like it or not - and there are many who do not - the nations of both groupings need each other. Indeed, I would contend that the big challenge - particularly for the richer nations of the West - is that the terms of this relationship are undergoing a profound transformation that will result in a change in the balance of power, although how that plays out remains impossible to foresee.

This makes week 6's topic - relations with China - even more significant. This is a country that seems to have suddenly appeared on the radar and poses fundamental questions of the rest of us, economically, politically and socially.

The question is whether its unique brand of "economic autocracy" (and we can debate that next week if you wish) represents a genuine alternative to the liberal democratic economics that have predominated in the West for the last century, or whether Will Hutton is correct in his thesis that the writing is on the wall for the current Chinese system - that without the "safety valve" of democratic accountability, China is destined to implode under the strains of internal social turmoil.

I look forward to hearing your thoughts on this!

Nick

**Subject:** Wrapping up Week 5