

Briefing of 11/28/2001

Challenges of Nation States by Global Institutions

by

Arif Rafiq and Faiyyaz Alloo (Team #10)

1. The Clash of Civilizations

Samuel P. Huntington argues that future conflicts will be fought on the basis of culture and civilizational divides and not on the basis of economic interests, ideology, or nationality. He states that the "fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future." The clash will occur due to his belief that differences among civilizations are far more fundamental than that among political ideologies and regimes, that the world is becoming a smaller place and interaction is increasing. In addition, the processes of economic modernization and social change throughout the world are separating people from longstanding local identities, leading also to more economic regionalism (e.g. EU, NAFTA, Economic Cooperation Organizations).

Huntington defines "civilization" as the highest cultural grouping of people and the broadest level of cultural identity people have short of what distinguishes humans from other species. Huntington identifies seven to eight major civilizations: Western, Confucian, Japanese, Islamic, Hindu, Slavic Orthodox, Latin American, and possibly African. Huntington also predicts the ascendancy of a so-called "kin-country" syndrome and that it will provide a civilizational rallying cause replacing political ideology and traditional "balance of power" considerations for cooperation and coalitions between states and nations. As a result the West will eventually stand against "the rest" and create a backlash against Western values which supposedly "differ fundamentally" from those prevalent in other civilizations. Huntington defines Mexico, Russia, and Turkey as "torn countries," i.e., countries with either large numbers of peoples of different civilizations (ex-Soviet Union or ex-Yugoslavia) or countries with cultural homogeneity but ambiguous identity and belonging (Mexico and Turkey). Finally, Huntington depicts the "Confucian-Islamic connection" as the most prominent form of non-Western civilizations challenging Western interests, values, and world domination. He is particularly concerned about nuclear, chemical and biological weapons, ballistic missiles and other sophisticated means for delivering them, and the guidance, intelligence and other electronic capabilities for achieving that goal. Examples include Chinese aid of Algeria, Libya, and Pakistan, and North Korean aid of Iran and Syria.

2. The Clash of State Interests

Fouad Ajami rejects in *The Summoning* Huntington's thesis and criticizes his unsophisticated and monolithic worldview ignoring empirical complexities and state interests which drive conflicts in and between civilizations. Ajami believes that states will remain the dominant factor influencing the global framework and interaction. Civilizational ties are only utilized by states and groups when they come in handy. Modernity and secularism are here to stay, especially in places with considerable struggles to obtain them. The Indian middle class, for example, will oppose religious extremism as their socio-economic status would suffer. Islamic fundamentalism is not a

sign of resurgence, rather it is an expression of bewilderment, guilt, and panic that the border with “the other” has been crossed. In other words, it is a confused or emotional reaction to increased interaction with the Western world.

Ajami also believes that civilizations do not control states, rather, states control civilizations. States only utilize brotherhood, faith, and kinship when it is in their interest to do so. He points out that Huntington ignores the various schisms in the Muslim world. For example, Iran is allied with Armenia (Slavic/Orthodox) and not Azerbaijan (Islamic). National interest, not religion, is most influential in power politics. Whereas, according to Huntington, nations are battling for civilizations relationships and ties, Ajami argues that they are competing for market shares in the world economy, want create jobs for their domestic populations and escape poverty. They want “Sony, not soil”. The secular idea, the state system, the balance of power, pop culture, and the delivery of welfare have been internalized in the remotest places. They are fixtures in Western and non-Western areas and will stand the test of time.

3. Managing Globalization

Dani Rodrik argues in *Sense and Nonsense in the Globalization Debate* that the two major camps in this debate miss each other's point: the pro-integrationists ignore the negative aspects of globalization, while the globalization critics ignore its positive elements. The debate has become overly political, full of opponent bashing, and devoid of significant critical lessons. Both sides have positive arguments and the debate must be shifted into a format that would focus on the positive and manageable aspects.

Rodrik believes globalization is not an independent and unlimited force, rather it is a result or object of other factors. For example, governments are not as controlled by economic globalization as one would think since much of economic activity happens within a country, not between countries. On the other hand one cannot deny that globalization matters when domestic policy-makers make decisions about the welfare of their constituency or when corporations decide where to relocate and to invest capital.

Globalization is not necessarily adverse to the expansion of welfare or the state in general. But international economic integration poses new dilemmas for protectionism and risk management. Free global trade indeed upsets traditional balances between capital and labor. It has the potential to undermine social contracts, labor standards, reduce wages, create a more unequal income distribution, and weaken social safety nets. But catchy phrases such as "low wage competition," "leveling the playing field," and "race to the bottom" are insufficient to grasp the complex reality. Trade deficits and labor costs are more related to differences in productivity of labor than to trade barriers or over-regulation. And foreign investment is more often increasing labor standards and working conditions in LDC's rather than leading to the opposite.

Trade globalization can hurt or help, depending on local, regional, and national conditions. A backlash can be avoided if the external strategy of liberalization is complemented by an internal strategy of compensation, training, and social insurance of

risk groups. The real challenge is to find a balance between the needs of the world markets and the needs of societies to maintain social peace.

4. Questions for Class Discussion

- 1) How well hold Huntington's theses in light of the September 11 events?

- 2) What steps can the world community undertake to prevent a "clash of civilizations"?

- 3) Is Ajami perhaps overly optimistic about the viability of modernity and secularism in the non-Western world? Aren't Huntington's examples as good or weak as those of Ajami?

- 4) Isn't Ajami's argument that non-Westerners prefer "Sony, not soil" itself too uncritical and simplistic?

- 5) Is Ajami's benign indifference about the potency of Islamic and other forms of religious, ethnic, and cultural "fundamentalism" supported by empirical facts? What about the dangers of Christian, Jewish, or Hindu fundamentalism?