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Civilizational futures: Clashes or alternative visions in the age of globalization?

Mustafa Aydın^{a,*}, Çınar Özen^b

^a Department of International Relations, Kadir Has University, Cibali, Istanbul, Turkey

^b Department of International Relations, Ankara University, Cebeçi, Ankara, Turkey

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ABSTRACT

This article underlines the existing similarities between Samuel Huntington's civilizational approach hypothesis and the fundamentals of political Islam. The similarity pertains to the argument related to the gradual weakening of nation-states, which also constitutes the main theme of the globalization debate. The civilizational approach and political Islam signify new efforts to reach a much larger political community and organization in world politics. Both of them argue that the formation of new political actor(s) is replacing the old nation-states across religious and cultural affinities. The terrorist organization Al-Qaeda is trying to legitimize its political violence by manipulating the weakness of the nation-states and the utopia of the formation of a much more comprehensive political community and political organization through Islam. Huntington's clash of civilizations thesis indirectly provides a base for Al-Qaeda's rhetoric and a certain type of justification for its terror activities, since the theory argues for the inevitability of the conflict between civilizations, regardless of their political regimes (liberal or totalitarian) with civilizations being determined by their cultural and religious differences—a theme that is used by the ideologues of political Islam.

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1. Introduction

Civilizational discourse has attracted renewed attention since the end of the Cold War and with the spread of globalization. The divisive characters of ethnic, religious and cultural differences and their potential to create conflicts between different groups have been extensively studied from different perspectives [4,5,17,18,21,31,36,48]. In the discussions regarding different sources of 'identity' and 'threat' to the world, Islam has attracted a particular attention [7].

Among those, Huntington's now (in)famous work [23] on the 'clash of civilizations' (CoC) has gained a special place. His CoC thesis projected a pessimistic view about the future of nation-states, which, though around for only a few centuries, is considered "as the principal actor in global affairs". He thus argued that civilizational identities will be increasingly important in the future and will shape world politics [23]. This view was intermingled with the globalization debate to produce a view on the role of nation-states as political actors in international politics that was weakening and a new political society based on transnational ideas. In the emerging post-Westphalian system, international regimes, non-governmental organizations, multinational companies, and transnational civil society organizations (based on ideas, identities, and

* Corresponding author at: Kadir Has University, Department of International Relations, Merkez Kampüs, Kadir Has Caddesi, 34083 Cibali, Istanbul, Turkey. Tel.: +90 212 5336532; fax: +90 212 5336515.

E-mail addresses: maydin@khas.edu.tr (M. Aydın), cozen@politics.ankara.edu.tr (Ç. Özen).

ultimately civilizations) became new actors of world politics. In this context, religious, ethnic and cultural differences were perceived as an integral part of globalization—thus the clash of civilizations process. Although many have since argued that Huntington's analysis, focusing solely on the differences between his so-called civilizations and ignoring the divergence within them, was too shallow to understand the complexities of the current world, it nevertheless had its attraction at both the academic and policy levels. When he introduced his ideas, those who viewed his work as part scientific study and part premonition comprised quite a large group [20,35]. As time went by, however, this perception was clouded with another view: could the CoC have been offered to us as the new global strategy of the US or the West [9,14]? On another level, while many analysts from the Muslim world in general dismissed his ideas as superfluous and instrumental [1,15,29,45], similarities between his vision and that of extremist Islamic groupings, such as Al-Qaeda, emerged in time.

Accordingly, this paper will first look critically at Huntington's version of the CoC and civilizational identities; then the all-conveniently established connection between Islam as a religion and Islam as a threat in the globalized world. Subsequently, this analysis will try to chart out the connection between political Islam (i.e. the ideology of Islam) and the civilizational approaches, as well as similarities between Al-Qaeda's new world order and Huntingtonian world view.

2. The clash of civilizations thesis and the globalized new world order

In his writings, Huntington defines civilizations as comprising large groups with common denominators in culture, religion and identity, and posits them as the main determinants of group identities, arguing that clashes between civilizational identities would be inevitable in the post-cold war era or post-ideological world, forming the next dominant pattern of conflict at the global level. Huntington defined 'civilization' loosely as the highest cultural grouping of people, distinguished by common objective elements – i.e. language, history, religion, customs, and institutions – on the basis of subjective self-identification. He divided the world into eight civilizations: Western, Sinic, Japanese, Islam, Hindu, Latin American, Orthodox, and African.¹

Huntington argued that the differences between civilizations were “far more fundamental than differences among political ideologies and regimes” and that they inevitably would lead to clashes. In line with this hypothesis, he assumed that the most intense type of identity-based threat would originate from Islam directly to the Western civilization. With the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq following Al-Qaeda's attacks in 2001, the US initially seemed to correspond with his CoC argument [47]. Huntington was of course neither alone nor the first person to argue for predetermined civilizational differences between Islam and Western (inherently Christian) cultures, as well as equating Islam with irreconcilable qualities with the modern (i.e. Western) world or civilization [22].

The vision of Islam as an alternative to Western liberal-modernist ideology stretches back to the depths of history, although it has gained heightened attention with the rise of terrorist activities around the world associated with militant Islamic groups as well as with the growing number of Muslim communities especially in the West [12,13]. Wright, for example, underlines the challenge of Islamic resurgence against the West arguing that “Islam is the only major monotheistic religion” offering “not only a set of spiritual beliefs but a set of rules by which to govern society” [50]. Lewis, arguing that there is no distinction between ‘Church’ and ‘the State’ in Islam, disagrees with the tendency to distinguish ‘Islam’ from ‘Islamic’ and with the assumption that religion means the same for the Muslims and the Westerners [32]. He underlines the differences between the Middle Eastern perceptions of identity from the West, arguing that the Muslim peoples awareness about their identity dates from the advent of Islam with some minimal references to pre-Islamic times. While the basic unit of human organization in the West is the nation, Muslims tend to see nation as a subdivision of the religious groups [32].

The end of the cold war and the disappearance of the communist threat also contributed to the perception of Islam as a threat to the West. The belief that Western society needed a “menacing subordinated other” led to Islamic threat filling in the gap left by communism. In this sense, “the end of the cold war led to claims that the spread of political Islam marks the onset of a new cold war where the West's liberal democratic values are pitted against the religious revivalist norms of political Islam” [37].

This line of reasoning, giving primacy to civilizational identities and perceiving clashes between civilizations as the major threats to global security, is misguided at best as Huntington's hypothesis necessitates the existence of unified and monolithic civilizations, which do not exist. In reality “civilizations are complex, encompassing diverse and often contradictory beliefs, values and forces that belie facile generalizations” [16]. He fails to explain the diversity and differences as well as the clashes for instance within the Muslim civilization [49].

The argument inherent in the civilizational approach about the weakening of the nation-states and the formation of blocs along civilizational lines pertains to the effects of globalization in the post-cold war era. Globalization clearly contributes to the resurgence of religion as a social and political phenomenon in a period where the long-demonized communist threat declined with the end of cold war, leading to an increase in identity-based threats, mainly associated with religion and so-called cultural differences. Globalization, through its tendency towards uniformity, helped to first impose “the materialistic and superficially universalistic set of Western values on the rest of the world” that “intensifies nationalistic and religious sentiments elsewhere”, and then the global spread of capitalism, the prospects for free movement of people and the expectations for better jobs with an expanding set of material desires created disappointments and resentments in those

¹ Huntington, first changed Confucian into Sinic and second eliminated Slavic from Slavic and Orthodox civilization. See Refs. [22,23].

places since people could not get what they expect [25]. As a response to the homogenization of culture by globalization and resentments created by the spread of capitalism, people drew themselves closer to their ethnic and religious identities. Stated differently, the search for a combination of religious and ethnic identities is regarded as a powerful response to the destructive forces of globalization [28].

However, the role of globalization in transforming the current ethnic and religious awakening to threat should not be exaggerated. In other words, globalization has not directly led to the resurgence of identity-based threats; rather it has acted as a contributing factor. The root cause for the rise of the threats associated with ethnic and religious identities was a combination of economic, political and social variables. When ethnic or religious groups had access to the political and socio-economic resources such as “sufficient income levels, voting rights, presence in commerce, access to political power, equal legal protection”, their ethnic or religious awakening stemming from globalization did not transform into threats or conflicts [25].

The civilizational approach bears two distinct characteristics, which mark the similarities between the civilizational approach and the trends toward globalization. The first characteristic of the civilizational approach is that it refers not to the state but to societies and relations between them. In this context, a new and larger society will be shaped along civilizational lines and replace the functional position of nations in international system as the main political actor. This shift from nations to larger civilizational societies will bring a process of civilizational bloc formation and ideological and political polarization. In this sense, Huntington’s approach implies the forthcoming end of the Westphalian international system and the emergence of a new world order.²

The second characteristic of the civilizational approach is that the concept of civilization is not directly linked to a particular political regime. In other words it is not only the state but also the regime that does not matter in this new approach in explaining the new bloc structure of international system. This deterministic approach conceptualizes a uniform Islamic world/culture that would inevitably clash with Western values (both culturally and politically) and ultimately with its civilization and political manifestations, independent from the type of political regime, totalitarian or otherwise, and societal differences within the so-called Islamic world. In Huntington’s thesis this argument is further blurred by over-generalization of the civilizational approach, as it is argued in general that the clash of cultures, by definition, regardless of temporary political regimes, is rooted in permanent societal culture. It of course also presupposes that the civilizations with conflicting cultural values would be bound to clash with one another.

Regardless of the problematic nature of uniformity in Huntington’s civilizational approach and his oversight of clear differences and cleavages within various so-called ‘civilizations’, his analyses have gained momentum after the 9/11 attacks, and strategies that utilize his views have become more widely discussed. The growing presentation of ‘Islamic’ terror targeting Western values combined with the new American security strategy, *Global War on Terrorism* emphasizing “Sunni extremism and the violent political utopia called Caliphate State”, has strengthened the impression that a worldwide cultural war is being played out. In this context, the civilizational approach and the concept of the CoC have provided an advantage for the American strategist from the tactical point of view: the war that was declared immediately after 9/11 easily conceptualized the other warring side as a transnational terrorist network operating on the bases of otherworldly Islamic concepts such as *tawhid*, *dawah*, *hakimiyah*, *ubudiyah*, *jihad* and *caliphate* state. Viewed in this light, the concept of conflictual civilizations was especially useful for evaluating an enemy who did not have any easily identifiable (and annihilate-able) state structures and operated through a hard-to-detect and pinpoint transnational network.

On the other side of the coin, the new world order concept based on the cultural separation lines that Huntington tried to explain bear a lot of similarities with Al-Qaeda’s understanding of international politics. Naturally Huntington has a very different starting point. His aim is to foresee the potential dynamics of world politics in the post-cold war era. However, by underlining the importance of religion as the main divisive political element and as the new political bloc forming dynamic, Huntington came very close to the premises of political Islam and the world view of Osama Bin Laden. Thus, Al-Qaeda as a phenomenon in international politics easily finds a logical justification in the Muslim societies within the context envisioned by Huntington’s CoC thesis; especially if/when the CoC concept is presented as a new global Western strategy against the Islamic world instead of a scientific/intuitive study.

Paradoxically, Huntington’s thesis and the idea that this justifies Al-Qaeda’s terrorism reinforce the radicalization apparent currently in Muslim countries, which in turn helps CoC to become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Although the problems and the needs of Muslims and Islamic societies vary from one country to another in the Islamic geography, the flipside of the CoC ideology in the Islamic world, i.e. the political Islam, projects similarities within the Islamic geography, based on CoC’s presumptions based on the views of an outsider. While political Islam is not able to offer a complete and monolithic response to the needs and demands of these societies and its currently most radical proponent, Al-Qaeda, is still a marginal movement that has so far failed to create a mass political current among the Muslim societies, it nevertheless attracts enough attention and this allows it to survive the onslaught of political, theological and military attacks as well as inflicting damages both in the Islamic and Western worlds. This is why political Islam today prefers to use terrorist methods to attract the attention of the Muslims around the world and thus this is why the combination of CoC predictions with the *Global War on Terror* strategy is a very dangerous mixture [3].

² Increasing attention is paid since the end of the Cold War to the emergence of post-Westphalian structures of international system. The role of 9/11 events are frequently referred as a catalyses for the emergence of “new” structures. For a study that looks into the conflictual discourse between Westphalian model and new approaches in IR, see Ref. [10].

3. Development of Islamic threat perceptions and political Islam

Huntington's CoC thesis hints especially at a potential conflict between democratic, liberal civilizations and Islamic 'totalitarian' civilizations. In this light, the 'other' for Western civilization after the cold war was identified as Islamic totalitarianism. Many scholars who agreed with this view argued that Islamic civilization should be expected to clash with Western values because of its 'conflictual' nature [46]. Although we came to live in a world where names like *Al-Jihad*, *Islamic Jihad*, *Gamaa Islamiyya*, *Hizb-ut Tahrir*, *Army of God*, *Islamic Liberation Front*, *Armed Islamic Group*, *Hezbollah*, *Hamas*, and *Al-Qaeda*, make the headlines almost daily in connection with terrorism, could there be a direct link between a religion (in this case Islam) and international terrorism?

Since the beginning of the 1990s the perception of the 'Islamic threat' has become a major issue in the discussions and politics of the West. The first (re)emergence of this stereotype, however, was directly linked to the Iranian Islamic Revolution of 1979 [19]. Later, the advent of the Taliban regime into power in Afghanistan after the Soviet withdrawal in 1988 and the loss of American control of the mujahideen fueled the fear of the spread of Islam to a wider region [34]. The perpetrators and the violent events that have led to the deaths of many civilians in the 1990s, such as the attack on the World Trade Center in 1993, the massacre of tourists in Luxor, Egypt in 1997, the bombings of US Embassies in Tanzania and Kenya in 1998, the attacks on New York and Washington, DC in September 2001, as well as the bombings in Madrid and Istanbul in 2004, and London in 2005, contributed to the re-emergence of the Islamic threat as the main issue of international security in the post-cold war era. These attacks unavoidably and all too easily established a connection between the use of terror and Islam as a religion.

The perception of Islam as a united threat to the (Christian) West in general goes back into, and mainly embedded in, the depths of history. By the end of the 7th century, a united Muslim community formed by the Prophet Mohammed at first and then ruled by his caliphs expanded its borders from North Africa to India. During subsequent centuries and under various rulers, Muslim rule and faith spread across the world either by peaceful means through conversion or by military means through conquest. That was how the Muslim threat was originally constructed mainly in the Latin West. The Crusades between the 11th and 13th centuries were the first fully-fledged response of Latin Christendom/West to the so-called 'Islamic threat'.

When the Byzantine capital was conquered in 1453 by Sultan Mehmet the Conqueror of the Ottomans, and later when the same power forced its way into the heart of Europe, the so-called 'threat of Islam' became part of daily life and cultural heritage – such as songs, plays, tales, etc. – of European societies. The idea that "Islam has a long record of state power and imperial expansion" [19], portraying it as a unitary and unique version of 'imperial expansion' distinct from other examples of such violent and expansionist manifestations of history, is clearly situated in the current Western reading of Islam as a threat. Thus, the resurgence of Islam as threat, taught in detail as a factual reality (in contrast to constructed reality) in the Western history books, and the West as defender of civilized world (or values) against this expansionist tradition is deeply rooted in this tradition.

Various inflammatory speeches and the declarations of recent political and intellectual figures from the Muslim world also contributed to these fears. In this sense, Islam easily emerged as a threat from the *dictums* of some of the political leaders of the Muslim countries. Thus the speeches of Iran's first supreme religious leader after the Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini, and its current President, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, played a special and significant role in the formation of this threat perception. In a similar vein, when we hear the likes of Osama bin Laden or Ayman al Zawahiri denouncing the West in total and calling for its destruction, a connection is easily made between political figures who provide the rhetoric and radical activists and/or terrorists who carry out the deeds.

When 'Islam-as-religion' is found lying at the heart of group identities of such radical entities as Al-Qaeda, housing violent and extremist fundamentalists ready to carry out suicidal attacks across the globe causing hundreds of deaths seemingly without caring who gets hurt, the causal connection between religion and the actual attacks is quickly established and Islam, under certain conditions, becomes a potential threat to global security. The fact that even though religion remains the major marker of those groups' identities, the threats associated with those groups might not result directly and solely from their religious motivations but from a combination of social, economic or political factors, is conveniently overlooked.

At this point we obviously need to differentiate the 'Islam-as-religion' from the 'Islam-as-political ideology', more popularly referred to as political Islam. Sardar defines the problem as a search for amalgamation of religious and political authority [40]. Roy picks up the theme that the Islamists speak of Islamist ideology rather than of religion in the strict sense of the term. To him the greatest challenge emerges from the political efforts to create a political model from Islam, capable of competing with the great ideologies of the Western world [34]. Although political Islam uses and manipulates the framework and the concepts of Islam-as-religion, the two are not identical and fundamental differences exist in their worldviews. The emergence of the ideology of political Islam was in general a 'modern' response to the various problems experienced by the Muslim societies under the pressure of modernization, such as inability to adapt to modern ways, erosion of traditional life styles, corrupt and authoritarian leaderships, mass unemployment, chaotic urbanization, external domination, spurious democratic systems, etc. As Halliday puts it, "for all their *Koranic* and religious form their programs [were] similar to those of Third World radical and populist movements, emphasizing such themes as oppression, liberation, and corruption" [19]. Inayatullah underlines the contradiction felt by the Muslims, between the Islamic ideal of an *ummah*, a global community of believers in the natural order transcending the cultural specificity and the rules of the corrupted despotic regimes existing in the Islamic political world [24]. Samaddar puts forward the role of the colonial past in the

making of the civilizational debate of the colonized nations [38,39,41]. In a sense, the emergence of political Islamic ideology was a response in the one hand to the colonial past and on the other hand to the failures of the post-independence regimes whose corruption, inefficiency and arrogance had alienated the populations over whom they ruled.

The commonly held threat perception from Islam (as religion) in the world in general is the confusion between these two separate phenomena. However, as the Western (mainly the US) response to the heightened threat perceptions develop through violent reactions, rhetorical radicalization and further alienation of Muslim societies, the existing confusion also helps the militants of political Islam to gain grounds in the Muslim world. Although it is the specific conditions and historical developments of specific societies that generate reactionary political ideologies in the Muslim world, and it is rather erroneous to presume that it is Islam-as-religion that produces the violent and the anti-Western manifestations of reactionary political and social attitudes, the propagandists of political Islam (or Islam as ideology) are able to generate wider public support for their political causes by purposely misleading them and justifying their violent political actions on the basis of their Islamic heritage, culture, traditions and ultimately religion. This is of course a very practical way to facilitate the spread of their new ideology and ensure support to its violent manifestations.

4. Political Islam and the civilizational approach

The roots of political Islam as a political ideology can be traced to the 19th century scholar and activist Jamal al-Din al-Afghani [8]. His philosophy and writings on religion and state rule as well as his call to “the Muslims to unite around their religion and stand up to European military and cultural aggression” [42] later resonated with political Islamists, especially with Sayyid Qutb.

The systematic construction of political Islam as an ideology, on the other hand, took place under the political conditions of the post-World War I Middle East and was later sharpened after the Iranian Islamic Revolution. The colonial powers and their stronghold over developing nationalism in the Middle East created a reactionary political response in the first quarter of the 20th century. The post-colonial era, where neither Arab nationalism nor Arab socialism was able to offer an acceptable alternative and where the dynastic autocratic regimes, in collaboration with colonial powers, deepened the anger and the fear of the Muslim peoples of the Middle East, did not produce a considerable change in the life of local populations or the political conditions they lived in. The insufficiency of the Arab states in managing the Israeli–Palestinian conflict increased the humiliation of these regimes. Under these conditions, political Islam constructed itself as a response to the local social, political and economic problems. While developing alternative approaches and programs to the domestic and international problems of the Arab world, political Islam widely employed the terminology and the culture of Islam as a religion. As an anti-imperialist, anti-Western, anti-Israeli, and anti-secular political ideology [49], political Islam, though not a religion, was particularly successful in disguising itself behind the religion.

In the context of the early-20th century Middle East, political Islam was mostly developed by the *Al-Ikhwan Al-Muslimoon* (Muslim Brotherhood) organization based on a combination of the views of Sayyid Qutb and Hassan Al-Banna [27,34,43]. The *Ikhwan*, founded in Egypt in 1928 as an underground political organization, became one of the main pillars of political Islam. While on the surface mainly targeting authoritarian regimes and corrupted political elites of the Middle East, the *Ikhwan* also started to criticize the West, Western values and their allies in the Middle East due to the perceived connection between the two and the continuous visible manifestations of Western stronghold over Middle Eastern Arab populations.

During the construction of the ideology, Sayyid Qutb and Hassan Al-Banna's critiques of Western values were based on the *Quran* and the *Sunnah*. This on the one hand provided the opportunity to be culturally different from the West, and on the other hand created confusion about where the religion stops and the ideology begins. Political Islam in the pronouncements of its ideological stance uses a religious terminology, but loads the well known concepts with new political meanings. The first and fundamental differentiation appears in the concept of *hakimiyyah* (sovereignty). According to Qutb, sovereignty overall belongs to Allah, which he later connects with the concept of *ulûhiyyet*. According to Qutb, *ulûhiyyet* on the one hand defines the uniqueness of Allah and on the other inherently signifies the transfer of sovereignty from the leaders of the tribes, administrators and the kings to Allah. Qutb argued that by this way the sovereign secular authorities would lose their control on the conscious, goods and the lives of the people. According to him the very first characteristic of *ulûhiyyet* is to revolt against secular authority which usurped sovereignty and the way of life constructed on this base [30]. The understanding of *hakimiyyah* is also closely linked with the understanding of *ubudiyyah* (complete submission of all humanity to Allah): “He who affirms his *ubudiyyah* to Allah alone thereby acknowledges the *hakimiyyah* and authority of Allah over everything” [2,26].

The result of sovereignty flowing from Allah is that it forces leaders to find a divine reasoning in order to gain legitimacy to rule. Since the rulers gain their legitimacy from a divine will and since they rule in the name of Allah, their accountability will be limited. In a sense, the doctrine of *hakimiyyah* through *ubudiyyah* becomes a justification for oligarchic classes taking over power with few restrictions in the name of Allah.

Qutb and Al-Banna constructed a ‘jihadist ideology’ atop this foundation. Since political Islam is a revolutionary ideology aiming to seize power to establish a new political order, violence is legitimized and advised for this political end. The concept of *Jihad*, which has violent as well as non-violent connotations, has been manipulated in political Islam to acquire a necessary instrument for the violent struggle for power. The first indication of the jihadist ideology came with Hassan Al-Banna's *Risalat Al-Djihad* (Essay on Jihad) published in 1930 [44]. Al-Banna and Qutb initially belittled the individualistic jihad as a concept. While Al-Banna argued against the *hadith* stating that fighting the enemy was the minor *Jihad* and the real *Jihad* was

to fight with one's self [11], Qutb claimed that it is bizarre to accept *jihad* as an “ordinary defensive war”, which is in fact a war to capture the sovereignty usurped from Allah and to restore the divine sovereignty [30].

Qutb and Al-Banna argued that to represent *jihad* essentially as an individualistic struggle to be a good Muslim is a malicious maneuver to paralyze the survival instincts of the Islamic world and aimed at weakening the enthusiasm of Muslims for *jihad*. For them *jihad* is a holy war against the non-Islamic rulers and the Christians who refuse to obey Islamic order. Qutb declared *jihad* against the Egyptian government and Westernism. The reinterpretation of *jihad* is the core issue for political Islam. It is described as a holy war to establish a new political order in the centrality of the *hakimiyyah* concept first in the Muslim countries and then throughout the world. Therefore *jihad* is an idea involving permanent struggle for Islamic world revolution [44].

Within the framework of the world revolution of jihadist ideology, Muslims are beckoned and sent to fight for a Muslim state first, then building Khalifa, and finally mastering the world with Islam; ‘a new world order’. According to Qutb, Islam reveals a global order and the mankind should reconcile with the Islamic global order [44]. The global order described by him is directly linked with the understanding of the concept of civilization, which is unique and comprehensive, and Islamic.

In the Islamic global order Qutb rejects the existence of nation-states as essential actors of the international system. According to him, secular nationalism implies division, and as concept which originated in the West [51], it creates bitterness and hatred through racial and national distinctions. Qutb argues that Islam is the nationality of all Muslims and there is no nationality for Muslims except Islam [26]. As a result, he rejects the national sovereignty concept as a political legitimacy instrument of the national and international political systems. In this sense the world is conceived as being comprised of larger political communities and organizations differentiated from each other with respect to religion. More directly, the differentiation is between the Islamic world and the others. In this regard, Huntington’s civilization concept is replaced by religion-based communities.

Political Islam is consistent with the two characteristics of Huntington’s civilizational approach. First, it conceives of a global order based on conflicting religious societies and believes in the uniqueness of the Islamic civilization while the rest should obey its order. Second, political regimes and distinct nations are artificial creatures in the global system, and only religious elements could form political communities such as states or bloc of states.

5. Al-Qaeda’s two-level warfare for a ‘new world order’

Al-Qaeda was formed in 1989 as an organization devoted to fighting the Soviets in Afghanistan. Bin Laden and Al-Zawahiri arrived at the recruitment base of Peshawar located on the Afghan–Pakistani border, along with other fighters who streamed in from all over the Arab and Muslim world to join the *Jihad* against the Soviet invasion [33]. At the end of the Soviet invasion, Osama bin Laden continued his struggle for political Islam in the anarchical political situation of Afghanistan, but this time he did not limit himself to the battle against the Soviets. At the beginning of 1980s, he went on to create, with the Palestinian militant Abdullah Azzam, the organization *Mekteb el-Khidmet* aiming at financing, recruiting and training *mujahideen*. Bin Laden also created another organization, *Beit Al-Ansar* (House of the Partisans), devoted to the military training of future fighters for political Islam. At this stage of the struggle he constructed a decentralized network for the organizational structure and worked out a database (*Al-Qaeda*) indexing the origins, profiles and competences of the fighters. Once discovered by the Americans, this database was adopted as the name for his political Islamist terrorist group [6].

Al-Qaeda is a terrorist organization using armed struggle and propaganda for political Islam and violence to transmit its messages to the Muslim world. Although lacking a clearly identifiable hierarchical organizational structure, the ideological consistency, the sameness of political goals, ideals and methodology to achieve them reveal a single framework conceived by Al-Qaeda. Different radical groups around the world forming Al-Qaeda are then interlinked via global communications and kept alive with their affiliation to the symbolic leadership of Bin Laden. This is what makes unique this terrorist organization. From this perspective, it is obvious that the ideological side of Al-Qaeda is much more crucial than the organizational structure to keep the organization alive and operable. This was proved by Al-Qaeda’s survival and operability even after its camps and facilities in Afghanistan were destroyed in 2001 [33].

Ideologically, Al-Qaeda and related jihadist groups follow Qutb’s interpretation of international politics. To conduct a ‘global jihad’ for a new world order, Al-Qaeda pursues two-level warfare. At the first level, Al-Qaeda has already begun a struggle to establish Islamic regimes in the Muslim world where political Islam will govern. For this, Al-Qaeda affiliated groups have been conducting armed and political struggle to overthrow the existing regimes and the rulers. This domestic political struggle is essentially concentrated on states where the majority of the population are Muslim and which are ruled by dictatorial regimes with little to no legitimacy in the eyes of the population. These people, who have suffered from all kinds of totalitarianism, and have never experienced a fully functioning liberal democracy, would be amenable to accept the ideology of Al-Qaeda as a progressive one. On the other hand, these communities traditionally are also inclined to form political communities according to religious principles. In other words, in the eyes of these people political Islam offers progress when compared with the old totalitarian regimes. In this respect, the failures of functioning nation-states with democratic regimes contribute to the reinforcement of Al-Qaeda’s ideology in the Muslim world.

The second level of Al-Qaeda’s war is at the international system level. At this level, Al-Qaeda is searching for a new type of Islamic bloc in international politics and is in the midst of a war to break down the Western-centered world system. For this reason Al-Qaeda targets Western communities. The terror offensive targeting civilians in Western societies are aimed at conducting the system level war of Al-Qaeda. These attacks are aimed at breaking down the communication channels

between Western and Islamic societies, and then possibly creating clashes. The struggle at the international system level reinforces the domestic political struggle in a sense that the echoes of Al-Qaeda's terrorist acts in the international media give Al-Qaeda a chance to transmit its political message to the Muslim world and to keep their supporters strong in their domestic political struggle.

On the tactical level, Al-Qaeda makes sure that there is a degree of coordination between these two levels of the war. It expects to increase its power in both levels in tandem with each other and knows that the coordination between the two levels reinforces the struggle towards its ultimate goal. CoC thesis plays a key role in keeping the coordination between the two levels. After every terrorist act, the Western public in general comes closer to the idea that Islam by definition is in conflict and struggle with the Western values, and the reactions coming from the West in turn helping to convince the Muslim audiences that the West is conducting a crusade against the Muslim world. Thus, Al-Qaeda accomplishes, through its coordination strategy, the goal of putting doubt in the minds of those who question the reality of the CoC thesis.

Al-Qaeda's war has another characteristic related with its transnational ideology. Al-Qaeda related groups are transnational actors acting across nations and states and using all the possibilities offered to them by the global system. In other words Al-Qaeda has adapted itself very well to the conditions of globalization and uses the structural weaknesses of nation-states in the age of globalization. The transnational character of Al-Qaeda terrorists, in a sense, is convenient for a war against nation-states and consistent with their global jihadist ideology. Finally, the transnational characteristic Al-Qaeda's conflict shows that the clash is not at the state level but should be seen as a war to create an alternative global order.

In reality of course Al-Qaeda is far from conducting a struggle for a new global political order. Even in the age of globalization, without having a state or a coalition of states under its control, political Islam will be undoubtedly bound to stay at the level of terrorist organization(s) and actions. In other words, the main target of the terror campaign of Al-Qaeda in reality is the regimes and the rulers of the Muslim world, and not yet the global order.

It is not yet possible to argue that Al-Qaeda's armed struggle and propaganda at either level has been successful. The Muslim world is still by and large bound to its national roots and not yet convinced of the reality of a single Islamic political community, the *Umma*. Al-Qaeda's threat to the world system, too, has not yet reached a serious level that would warrant an all out warfare in traditional style including armies of nation-states and occupation of countries. In essence, Al-Qaeda's threat would remain marginal to the nation-state system so long as it continues to lack a strong state base; even Afghanistan was not powerful and sufficient enough to provide Al-Qaeda that base. Neither the transnational methodology nor the CoC perception on both sides is strong enough to convince Muslim populations around the world that they live in a new unannounced cold war. On the other hand Al-Qaeda is quite successful in scaring Western societies and igniting fear and abhorrence against Islam. It also helps convince Western populations at large that we live in a world where a CoC is fast becoming a reality. The growing validity of the civilizational approach in the minds of the Western public will in turn reinforce Al-Qaeda's jihadist ideology in the Muslim world. Thus the anti-Islamic currents taking root in Western countries are making possible what Al-Qaeda could never do with its propaganda and terrorism.

6. Conclusion

The security agenda of world politics in the post-cold war era has been shaped largely along a new 'Islamic threat'. Could political Islam, as an ideology, win the battle against the West and bring the world to a new polarization? The globalization debate, indicating the weakening of the nation-state as the main political actor in world politics and the inescapable formation of larger political communities across transnational lines, offered a new meaning to this emerging threat. Would religious communities or civilizations replace nation-states and clashes along civilizational lines emerge?

Huntington developed his thesis of CoC at this point to explain the growing importance of civilizations in the era of globalization. Al-Qaeda as a transnational terrorist organization acting on a global scale and projecting a new (religious) ideology was the living proof of the CoC thesis. However, the other side of the coin was also true: the CoC thesis and globalization influencing the societies of the developing Muslim nations have reinforced the effect and the reach of political Islam and the radical extremist groups from the Muslim world.

The reaction of the US after the 9/11, and the global war on terrorism strategy, was influenced by and later supported the CoC thesis. The global war on terror is a strange struggle. On the one hand there is a transnational terror organization with global aims and militants from various Islamic countries; and on the other, there is a loose coalition of nation-states under US leadership. It is clear by now that the civilizational approach inherent in the US neo-conservative security strategy does not help the ideological struggle against global terror. On the contrary it coincides with the ideological background of Al-Qaeda and creates counter-productive effects on the Muslim world. Huntington's civilizational approach of accepting Islam as a comprehensive, monolithic and integral civilization with an ideology (i.e. political Islam) and giving it a new political function in the international system has played a role in opening fertile ground that Al-Qaeda could never have otherwise achieved. The global war on terror strategy, to the extent it became an instrument targeting only the Muslim populations around the world, reinforces the inevitable clash thesis and reinforces fears and anger in Western societies against Islam as a religion and currently produces a counter-productive hostile environment against the West in Muslim societies.

Al-Qaeda's ideological foundation – political Islam – is clearly not capable of achieving its overarching ambitions. Its foundations have so far been sufficient only in persuading some fanatics, who had been alienated from their own societies as a result of repressive governments, or who were not represented within their own countries, and who suffered national humiliation at the hands of foreigners, along with poverty, and inequality to carry out acts of terror. The realization of these

acts is only understandable within the context of the CoC approach and is only possible with the opportunities afforded to Al-Qaeda by globalization, mainly the developments in communication and transport technologies that allowed fast movement of money and people. Thus the global struggle against Al-Qaeda's alternative world vision can only be successful if one does not operate within its partner ideology, i.e. the CoC thesis, but targets the infrastructure of terror as opposed to engaging in an ideological struggle based on the civilizational approach.

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