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After and Before Nine-Eleven: A Civilizational Clash
ISCS 2008 Conference Keynote Address

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On the morning of September 11, 2001, I was in Kuala Lumpur, the capital city of Malaysia, and it was nearly nine o'clock in the evening—as Asia is about 12 hours ahead of East Coast time in the U.S. Luckily, I was more interested in getting some sleep than in watching the latest news.

So when I awoke the next morning and retrieved my email, the first message I got was from a young Malaysian colleague who wrote, “Prof-- US is bombed!” Of course the news struck me with disbelief as it did my Chinese-Malaysian colleague and all other Malaysians. As we know, from that point onward, attitudes towards America from outside the US began their subtle shift from awe and appreciation to suddenly expressed dislike and opprobrium.

The overbearing US role in world affairs up to that point in history suddenly came to be seen, as one Malaysian intellectual put it just a couple of weeks after 9/11, as the worst influence on the world in the whole 20th century.¹

A more ambivalent attitude was expressed by one of my cab drivers who said of the 9/11 events, “it was bad because innocent people were killed, but it was good because the US got a slap in the face.” We have all heard these sentiments before. Since the US invasion of Iraq attitudes towards the US have mainly gone down hill, as various international surveys show.

But what of the fact that the airplane hijackers were Muslim militants and were, so they thought, in the service of

an Islamic jihad against the West sponsored by the shadowy organization called al-Qaeda?

As a scholar who had sympathy for Muslims as religious people and who knew many Muslims personally, my first reaction to the 9/11 events was to think that this was the most disastrous event to befall the Muslim world in its entire history—even including the Mongol sacking of Baghdad in 1258.

However, the events of 9/11 represent an encounter of a totally different order: Muslim militants had violently attacked two US cities—New York and Washington, D.C. – and from an *interreligious* point of view, the 9/11 events were the most devastating calamity for the Islamic world because it was a highly visible event, instantly relayed around the world. Consequently, once it was known with certainty that the highjackers were Muslims, it meant that Muslims around the world would be branded by people in the West, rightly or wrongly, as terrorists.

The undeniable assault on the most significant symbol of Western hegemony, the United States, above all, the World Trade Center in New York City and the Pentagon in Washington, D.C., by undoubted Islamic militants from Egypt and Saudi Arabia, sealed the fate of Islam as a militant religion, if not a terrorist faith.

Of course there were Americans and others who sympathetically asked, “Why do they hate us?” and who believed that the terrorist attack was in some way provoked by the overbearing posture of the US in the World. But it should be noted that the “they” here is really a small band of terrorists associated with al-Qaeda, not the broader Muslim public.

So I ask—what should we make of the putative clash of religious fanatics from the Middle East with the West?

After the unfolding of the events of 9/11 and even after the blundering war in Iraq, I have come to three conclusions: The *first* is that the 9/11 attacks were the product of a civilizational clash that began in the 20th century. *Second*, this dramatic clash of the 21st century has in fact burst a bubble that previously prevented any serious civilizational dialogue between Islam and the Christian world. That is to say, for generations despite many ecumenical overtures from sympathetic Western intellectuals, Muslim religious leaders consistently refused to enter into a dialogue with Western religious leaders.

A very recent expression of that attitude occurred in tranquil Malaysia in 2002. It took the form of prohibiting any public discussion of Islam by those “with little knowledge of Islam.” That edict by the religious authorities of Malaysia ensnared very unlikely scholars, one being a Muslim Ph.D. in Political Science who was also an outspoken journalist. Another was the first Malaysian born non-Muslim who was fully trained in Islamic studies and knew Arabic. She was a woman teaching at the University of Malaya. Both were warned not to speak about Islam publicly. As far as I know the ban remains in effect.² Nevertheless, I do think the door is open for at least tentative dialogue.

But my *third conclusion* is that there is a fundamental underlying clash of civilizations (in a non-violent sense). It stems from the irreducible fact that Islamic law (shari’a) and international, Western inspired law are essentially different. Our Western and largely Christian-inspired assumption is that religion is about *correct theological belief* (that is, orthodoxy) but in the Islamic world the issue is one of orthopraxy, that is, proper conduct.

For Muslims, the question is how to be a good Muslim if you do not follow the Shari’a (Islamic sacred law). In the most

practical sense, Islamic law is about whether some action is *permitted, encouraged, commanded, or forbidden*. While there is a general concern for social justice in the Muslim world, the grand issues of *constitutionalism, creating proper spheres of legal jurisdiction, citizenship and universal human rights* have not played significant parts in Islamic religious and legal thought until very recently.³

And while it is true that law in the Muslim world was reformed and remade along the lines of Western law from the late 19th century to the present, that reform and replacement has come to be seen by large segments of the Muslim world as unwanted.

Accordingly, that history which pushed the traditional Islamic concerns about proper social conduct aside in favor of *international law* that stresses abstract, impersonal, and theoretical *standards for groups* of people has become a source of rejection for certain segments of the Muslim world. In other words, removing the Shari'a (Islamic sacred law) from the center of the Muslim community could be seen as removing the heart of Islam.⁴

Let me try to spell out the path to this deeper crisis that has been very poorly managed by politicians and religious leaders in the West and in the Muslim world during the past century and in the present.

A Civilizational Paradigm

First a couple words about our “civilizational” paradigm. It is clear that this great worldwide encounter of the early 21st century is a “Civilizational” conflict, not a nationalist clash between the United States (or the US & Europe) and a nation-state such as Viet Nam—or Iraq.⁵

Invoking those two names will tell us that unlike the war in Viet Nam, involving an aspiring *nationalist* movement

and a military intervention by the US, today's conflict is entirely different from the past, despite that political leaders in Washington stumbled into a so-called "War on Terror" that is based on the wrong paradigm.

The prevailing view in Washington (certainly under the Bush Administration) and, I'm sure, in policy circles, is one in which nation states are the primary actors while the possibility of civilizational identities and civilizational issues are completely overlooked.

Whether we speak of the war in Iraq or the broader symbolic conflict involving actors in the Muslim world, we are talking about an encounter between two large civilizational areas—the so-called West and the Muslim world – each held together symbolically and practically by their *contrasting* religious, legal, and philosophical orientations.

Indeed these two great units were founded on very different *legal* conceptions, *philosophical* assumptions, and *theological* orientations. I say this even though there are those who point out that the "three religions of the book" (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) share the same "Abrahamic" religious foundations. That may be so, but it does not negate the existence of the intellectual, legal, and philosophical differences (about which I shall say more) that need to be seen through the prism of civilizational analysis.

Furthermore, these differences of worldview have been around for centuries; they are not new, although Americans (and many Europeans) are discovering them for the first time. Furthermore the conflict with the Islamic world also exists with other parts of the world besides the West.⁶

In short, the present worldwide conflict is a contemporary historical laboratory designed just for us Civilizationalists who want to study how *civilizations* are constructed, how

they operate, and how they do or do not enter into peaceful dialogue with each other.

20th Century Shifts of Authority in the Muslim world

The conflict and encounter that I am highlighting here must be seen against major events and shifts in *world* history in the 20th century. Indeed it must be seen as part of *interactive world history*. Historians, for example, have long noted the conflicts and encounters between the West and the Muslim world, especially during the late Ottoman period, such as the siege of Vienna in 1687 (not to mention the crusades).

Likewise in the late 18th century we witness European armies beginning to invade the Middle East, launching what many call the rise of European colonialism and imperialism. But what has not been fully appreciated is the degree to which the 20th century was a singularly transformative period for the Islamic world, shaped by the forces of *Westernization*.⁷

That process was seen by significant numbers of Muslims as Western *cultural imperialism*. This was a period of intense encounters between the Muslim countries of the Middle East and Western influences—some military and some simply cultural and economic. But the fact that articulate Muslim spokesmen saw it as *cultural imperialism* suggests how different the civilizational foundations of “East” and “West” were perceived to be in the Muslim world.

The complete collapse of the Ottoman Empire as a result of World War I was a huge event that had a tremendous impact on Muslims across the Middle East and the world. The result was the carving up of an empire into nation-states across a vast region that Muslims saw as a religious caliphate, a political empire based allegedly on following the rulership of Mohammad.⁸

However, it was only late in the 17th century that the Ottoman Sultans (re)claimed the title of “successor” to the Prophet (Caliph of Islam). Nevertheless, this collapse of an empire destroyed any illusion that the Muslim world represented a coherent political or military power. This was a powerful shock to the psyche of Muslims across the Middle East and it generated a sense of humiliation that continues to reverberate in the 21st century.

For some Muslims, especially those outside Turkey, the idea of creating a whole new state apparatus in Muslim lands based on Western models was the ultimate betrayal of the Muslims’ conception of religious leadership.

The program of Mustapha Kemal Atatürk to create a new *nation-state* out of Turkey was designed to jettison Islamic educational institutions and Islamic law in favor of Western models. For Atatürk there was no doubt but that Islamic law, culture and educational practices were responsible for the economic, scientific and technological retardation of Islamic civilization, and that Western and international models had to be incorporated in his new state to secure a firm foundation for development. Even Arabic script was to be abandoned.

Equally radical was the Kemalist mandate that women were to have an equal share in national affairs while being forbidden to wear Islamic head coverings in public. All of this appeared in the new Constitutional legislation of 1923 and thereafter, along with the abolition of the Islamic Caliphate (1924).⁹

Likewise in Egypt, reformers appeared at the end of the 19th century who understood the need to reform Muslim education and to fill gaps in Islamic law by incorporating Western legal reforms. Yet the madrasas could not be reformed because they were essentially static legal forms, and their scholarly representatives had no interest in reform.

Madrasas were designed to preserve the “transmitted” Islamic sciences, not to promote intellectual innovation.¹⁰

Of course there are many reasons for thinking that the attempt to reform Middle Eastern forms of law, government, and education was a good and essential thing. Indeed, neither traditional Islamic education nor Islamic law embodied in the Shari’a was capable of preparing people or societies for full participation in the modern world, especially the modern world that we now inhabit.

It should also be noted that up until the late 19th century, there was nothing like an Arab national consciousness, largely because of the dominance of the Ottoman Turks in the region for centuries. Consequently, the so-called Arab awakening occurred in the late 1880s, and flowered only briefly with the collapse of the Ottomans.¹¹

In the end, the Arabs were unable to create a national or regional organization that had any political significance until after the time of Gamal Abdel Nasser in Egypt. In the 1950s, he cobbled together a “United Arab Republic” that was as ephemeral as the maps he had printed to pretend that the entity existed.

But that said, it is not difficult to imagine that with the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and the imposition of Western ideas along with other intrusions, there would be loud voices raised throughout the Muslim world opposing such a radical remaking of Muslim civilization along the lines of Western civilization.

Oppositional, and some would say, reactionary voices emerged across the Muslim world that opposed the reforms that the generation of reformers of the early twentieth century had proposed to carry out—precisely for the purpose of uplifting and modernizing Muslims educationally, economically and politically.

For sure, a variety of new social, political and economic forms based on Western ideas were incorporated in Middle Eastern countries during the first half of the 20th century, but the indigenous reaction against them by what I shall call the *new Islamism*, or *Political Islam*, ultimately won the day, tragically impacting the world on 9/11 in this century.¹²

The great irony of the history of the Middle East in the 20th century is that in many places it ended up far more conservative and Islamist than it was at the opening of that century. This is to say, an Islamic identity transcending national identities became more intense and real than in previous generations, and it increasingly became defined *in opposition to* the so-called “West.”¹³

From a developmental point of view, it might be said that for the Muslim world, it was a lost century because very little political and economic progress has been made, and certainly far less than in Asia. For very different reasons that lost developmental progress could be compared to China that also lost a whole century (or more), yet now has taken immense strides forward.¹⁴

But let us return to the problem of the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the displacement of the traditional *ulama*, coupled with the encroachment of Western powers who hoped to remake the Middle East along the lines of a very different civilizational design.

Displacing the *Ulama*¹⁵

Up until the middle of the 20th century, old-style Islamic scholars, the *ulama*, held sway within Muslim circles, and maintained pre-modern views on most subjects, including antipathy to the modern media, to aspects of modern science and technology, and many other innovations. They were

indeed illiterate in the ways of modern society as it then existed.

However, the 20th century saw the rise of what I shall call lay-scholars who more or less usurped the traditional role of the *ulama*. Once the exclusive right of the religious scholars to speak out on religious topics had been breached, a variety of educated Muslims dared to add their voices, and sometimes dominated discussion.

Sometimes, as we have seen recently, in the rhetoric of the ideologues of *al-Qaeda*, their brand of Islam is not progressive. There are many reasons for this redirection of Islamic thought that coalesced in mid-20th century. Most significantly, the new Islamists were not trained in traditional Islamic institutions, that is, not trained in the law schools of the *madrasas*, with the result that they pushed aside a major principle of Islamic legal thought, that is, the concept of *consensus (ijma)*. This is the putative consensus of the scholars, especially the ancient scholars on legal questions.

The three most significant examples of this process of displacing the traditional scholars include Hassan al-Banna, the Egyptian school teacher who founded the Muslim Brotherhood in 1928; Sayyid Qutb who became the chief intellectual architect of the Muslim Brotherhood from the late 1950s until his execution by Gamal Abdel Nasser in 1966; and Maulana Mawdudi, the journalist turned religious commentator, who worked out the rationale for turning Pakistan into an ideological Islamic state back in the 1950s. He also significantly influenced Qutb. Of course the 13th century conservative religious scholar, Ibn Tamiyya, also added fuel for this new identity.

All three of these 20th century Islamists—al-Banna, Qutb, and Mawdudi—saw Islam as the answer to the Muslim community's problems, its stagnation and political

impotence. They pushed it in an Islamist direction that called for a return to some imagined pure and harmonious state in the Islamic past. Together they shaped the new activist Islam that proved to be so widely supported throughout the Middle East, and to a lesser degree, in many parts of Asian Islam. I shall discuss only the first two of these intellectual architects of the new Muslim identity.

The Muslim Brothers

It might seem that the collapse of a large empire such as the Ottomans, which has often been labeled militaristic, autocratic, and oppressive for Muslims outside of Anatolia, would be greeted either with happiness or scarcely noticed at all by ordinary Muslims.

That collapse, however, was accompanied by Atatürk's reforms that I noted earlier, but also the occupation of Egypt by British forces along with French occupation of major parts of the Maghreb. These acts of colonialism spawned a profound sense of alienation and oppression on the part of Muslims in Egypt and North Africa. Soon the Egyptians rallied to end the British political occupation while others rallied to reject every aspect of the worldview that the British occupiers represented.

The founding of the Muslim Brotherhood in that context reflected a deep emotional resonance. It suggested that Muslims in Egypt had fallen into the hands of a completely alien power that was, in their view, not just occupying their land, but bent on destroying the soul of Islam and their identity.

Perhaps more surprising is that a humble school teacher, Hassan al-Banna, born in a remote Egyptian village, grappled with the core meaning of this civilizational encounter and, through relentless preaching and political activism, created

the Muslim Brotherhood that became the most significant political force in modern Egyptian history.

He is the major figure who first constructed the idea that “Islam is the solution.” According to his way of thinking, Muslims had to confront the challenge of the West. From his point of view, the decadence, state of humiliation, and depravity he saw in Egypt in the 1920s was caused by Muslims falling away from their true faith. Furthermore, he held that it is “the nature of Islam to dominate, not to be dominated, to impose its law on all nations, and to extend its power to the entire planet.”¹⁶

The struggle to regain that true faith became the springboard for all sorts of activist Islamist groups that agitated for the singularity of the Muslim way of life, to the exclusion of modern and Western ideas. And it spawned a variety of *jihadi* groups.

As the movement grew it adopted a variety of organizing techniques, established publishing houses, and founded hospitals, schools, factories and welfare societies to benefit Muslims. The Brotherhood even raised a small army for the purpose of fighting in Palestine.

In 1949 when Hassan al-Banna was assassinated by government agents —probably in reaction to the violence and murder that the Muslim Brothers had sponsored—his intellectual successor, Sayyid Qutb was in the United States (in New York). He had not yet joined the Islamist movement. Moreover, he had been known up until that point as a novelist, poet and literary critic, not a religious writer. He had also served as Minister of Education. But when he got back to Cairo, the decadence and corruption, the availability of Western movie houses, restaurants serving alcohol, along with the extreme womanizing of King Farouk, sent Qutb into

an extreme reaction against all forms of modern Western life, more extreme even than al-Banna's reaction.

Although Qutb spent most of his time in the U.S. in rural Greeley, Colorado, he came away from America repulsed by the freedom of young men and women to mix freely and to dance in public. No doubt the sexual freedoms, even as old-fashioned as they now seem to us, offended Qutb. By temperament he was an abstemious person and the signs of hedonism he saw in the U.S., and probably even more so in Egypt under western influences, turned him resolutely against the West and modernity.

From that point onward he devoted his life to articulating his version of the proper Muslim way of life, setting it sharply against Western culture and sensibilities. He became the new architect of the ideology of the Muslim Brothers. There was no doubt in his mind, that of the two dangers, losing territory or losing his idea of the Muslim way of life, it was the latter that was the most dangerous.

One might lose territory and still preserve the Muslim way of life; but if a community retained all its territory but did not preserve its Islamic way of life, then all was lost. Consequently, he saw the founding of the Israeli state in Palestine in 1948 as a lesser evil than the corruption and unIslamic behavior of Egyptian officials and private citizens.

Nevertheless, the officers involved in the coup d'état that brought Gamal Abdel Nasser to power in 1952 had been involved with the Muslim Brothers. Nasser at first encouraged them, but the inability of Qutb and the Muslim Brothers to accommodate to the Socialist regime of Nasser put them on a collision course with the Egyptian state apparatus that has lasted from the time of Qutb to the present. In October 1954, several Muslim Brothers attempted to assassinate Nasser,

and that led to the crackdown on the Brotherhood and Qutb's imprisonment along with others.

During the 10 years of his imprisonment, Qutb managed to continue organizing the Muslim Brothers while writing tracts in support of their cause. He wrote a very extensive commentary on the *Quran* (*In the Shade of the Quran*), though he was not a person trained in religious or legal scholarship. In addition to that, he wrote a little book called *Milestones (or Signposts) on the Way*, published in 1964 when he was released from prison.

In this work Qutb created a manifesto redefining the Muslim way as one absolutely dedicated to the observance of the *Shari'a*, Islamic sacred law, as if there were no question about what it prescribed or what it meant. He insisted even more than al-Banna that Islam was a complete way of life and that it was at its core unalterably opposed to Western ideas and ideals.

The most radical element of Qutb's manifesto was his redefinition of the concept of *Jahiliyya*, the pre-Islamic "era of ignorance" before the arrival of the Prophet Mohammad. He re-interpreted this to mean any past or contemporary state in which the *Shari'a* was not fully imposed on the Muslim community. That meant that virtually every Muslim community then existing was in a state of *Jahiliyya*, a state of ignorance and/or disobedience to God's law.

Furthermore, Qutb claimed that it was the duty of every true Muslim to oppose such a state and to engage in *jihad*, religious and political struggle, to depose the leaders of such communities or states and to work toward the imposition of the sacred law of Islam, the *Shari'a*. Qutb clearly championed the idea of *jihad* as a battle against unbelievers, but those unbelievers included not only non-Muslims in the West or elsewhere, but also nominal Muslims who did not follow the

narrow prescriptions of Islamic law as understood by Qutb and the Muslim Brothers.

This led in the 1960s to the formation of several other groups of *jihadis*. These included a group called *Takfir w'al hijra* ("Condemn and Emigrate") as well as a group committed to the tactical use of violence, the *Gamaa Islamiyya*.¹⁷

For the Western world it is perhaps the founding of al-*Jihad* that seems most significant. It was founded by two Islamist ideologues who joined *al-Qaeda*: one was Ayman al-Zawahiri, the Egyptian-trained doctor who became Bin Laden's lieutenant; the other was another physician, now known as Dr Fadl, who was the real leader of that group and a major intellectual sponsor of violent *jihad* in the 1980s. Dr Fadl has recently made international headlines by publicly renouncing his earlier justifications of the use of violence.¹⁸

It should be observed that this radical idea of condemning other Muslims because they do not conform to a particularly rigid Islamist idea of proper Muslim conduct gave these essentially lay individuals an extraordinary power never before taken so seriously in the Muslim world.¹⁹

As I noted earlier, this intellectual turn completely jettisoned the third root of Islamic law-- that is-- scholarly *consensus*. Of course this is a vague idea but it does imply that one needs to consult the major legal scholars of the past and present before issuing an edict. Furthermore these *takfiris*, as these lay ideologues have been called, were generally not juridically qualified to make such statements, that is, to issue *fatwas*.

Nevertheless, this new idea of condemning all those who disagree with one's own religious commitments that emerged in the 1960s gave extraordinary power to self-appointed Islamists while at the same time it undermined the role of the traditional religious scholars, the *ulama*. Armed with these

new doctrines, the Muslim Brothers became more dangerous than they had been before as they displaced the traditional scholars (the *ulama*). Consequently, Nasser moved once again to put them in jail, including Qutb, who was executed in 1966 for advocating violence.

Another indication of how far this ideology of “condemn and emigrate” spread in the years after the founding of the *Takfir w'l hijra* is seen in recent reports that some of the insurgents held in Iraqi prisons have been referred to as “*takfiris*.” That is, those who hold very narrow views of Islamic conduct and feel free to use torture or other violent means to intimidate their fellow Muslims.²⁰

Hard on the heels of these dramatic events in Cairo surrounding Qutb’s execution in 1966, another major event that many readers will recall took place: the Six-day June war of 1967. It is said that the small Israeli forces defeated the “whole Arab world” in just six days. This defeat of the Arab forces had an enormous psychological impact on Muslims throughout the region. Students of this era maintain that this event tipped the balance, triggering a great wave of religious revival that swept across the region.²¹

It is from this time onward that one finds the sudden flowering of Islamic dress in places like Cairo, Damascus and elsewhere: men growing beards and women returning to the veil and much more.²² The general interpretation of this turning point is, almost following Qutb’s diagnosis, that God punished the Muslims for falling away from Islam, whereas the Jews, according to the Muslim view, proved stronger because of their greater religious faith and won the war. Of course this was projection as far as most Jews and Israelis are concerned.

This upsurge of religious sentiments was accompanied by a rise in government-sponsored religious programming

on radio and TV and the flowering of the “Islamist trend,” the religious awakening that has swept through all the professional associations, doctors, lawyers, judges, engineers and students in Egyptian universities during the last 30 years of the 20th century.²³ It can be found in many other states in the Middle East and North Africa.²⁴

In the meantime, Sayyid’s Qutb’s tract called *Milestones on the Way* became a best seller and is probably the most influential book in the Muslim world after the *Quran* itself, even though it was banned in Egypt and other countries. It is reported to have gone through 2,000 editions, not just printings. It clearly struck a resonant chord among Sunnis and Shi’a around the world.

This is not to suggest that the Islamist movement of Sayyid Qutb is the only face of Islam in the world today; far from it. But it has without question become an exceedingly powerful influence across Muslim lands. While the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt did go through a very violent phase, it is important to note that not all the followers of Qutb accepted violent methods. The Islamist trend within Egypt itself today seems much more non-violent than in the past, and more peaceful than the Mubarak government cares to acknowledge. But it was responsible for killings in the 1980s and 1990s.

A curious side note to Qutb’s execution was the arrival of a telegram sent from Palestine to the Egyptian government in 1966 deploring the execution of Qutb. It seems that the telegram was sent by Abdullah Azzam, a Palestinian scholar, first trained in an agricultural school and then later in religious studies at al-Azhar (the oldest and most famous *madrassa* in the Muslim world, located in Cairo).

He became a major ideologue for *al-Qaeda* when he wrote a book in 1988, claiming that it was the individual Muslim’s

duty to undertake Jihad in defense of Muslim territories in Afghanistan or wherever Muslims were threatened. He thereby *internationalized* the idea of Islamic jihad. Other fatwas that he or Ayman al-Zawahiri authored justified martyrdom and violence against women and children. But he was only one of several *jihadis* who wrote books supporting violent jihad at that time.²⁵

The Iranian Revolution of 1979

The next big historical event of that era that shaped the encounter between the Muslim world and the West was the Iranian Revolution of 1979. It brought an extreme Islamist regime to power in the *Shi'a* world. The Shah of Iran in the 1970s had launched a Westernizing and modernizing program that went too far too fast, triggering a revolt of the *Shi'a* Islamic scholars, the mullahs, and precipitated the great Iranian Islamic Revolution of 1979.

This relentless westernizing coupled with the regime's brutality and corruption doomed Iran to a great step backwards out of which it has yet to emerge. Note that the Shah also had attempted to ban the wearing of head scarves (chadors) in public by Iranian women, but now that is the mandatory costume of the day. This head covering remains a taboo subject for public discussion in Iran even today, despite the fact that young women constantly flout the convention in subtle ways.²⁶

The Iranian Islamist revolution gave an immense psychological boost to the idea that the Islamic community, both *Shi'a* and *Sunni*, should not be dominated by Western ideas and interests. For some Muslims, even those living in the US, this great event showed that "Muslims can fight back." It suggested to the Muslim community that perhaps it was still possible for a truly Islamic modern state to

exist. Naturally policy makers in Washington were greatly fearful that the Islamic revolution would spread across the Middle East and the broader Muslim world. Hence the US government tacitly encouraged Saddam Hussein to militarily oppose the Iranian regime in the 1980s.

The Wahhabis

Still another powerful Islamist current during the 20th century came from the *Wahhabi* influences of Saudi Arabia. It is important to mention this influence because the Saudis' skyrocketing oil revenues in mid-20th century enabled them to spend vast sums of money exporting their severe *Wahhabi* form of Islam around the world. Their pamphlets extolling *Wahhabi* Islam appearing in Cairo fed into the Islamist trend there also.

The Saudis established schools and universities and built mosques that generally represented a far more conservative and repressive Islam than was practiced elsewhere in the Muslim world at the time. The Islamic University of Malaysia founded in the early 1980s is such an organization, but I have to say it looks to me entirely benign apart from the rigid separation of the sexes and related restrictions on intellectual freedom.

The Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan

Finally, the last major historic event of enormous political significance in the 20th century was the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979. This event can only be called one of the most colossal political miscalculations in history. Whether the US intervened covertly or not to counter the Russians, the Afghan war of the 1980s would have turned into a great *jihadi* cause, as it did. Whether or not the US, once it had covertly joined the *jihadi* forces in fighting the

Soviets, could have prevented Afghanistan from turning into the Taliban haven that it did become after the Soviet defeat and withdrawal, is a moot point.

The damage had been done and the so-called “freedom fighters” (*mujahideen*) had been summoned, an Arab-Afghan militia had been created, and the intellectual foundations for international violent *jihad* had been laid by Egyptian and other Arabs influenced by the Islamist trend flowing out of Egypt.²⁷

The 20th Century Clash

If now we step back to survey the 20th century and the Muslim world *in civilizational terms* (and I have omitted the Islamist developments in Pakistan and southeast Asia), it seems evident that major sections of the greater Muslim world during the 20th century felt themselves under siege politically and ideologically. Of course it is true, from a policy point of view, and even from the point of view of constitutionalism, that not all of the Muslim states were in harmony. On the other hand, it would be a mistake to conclude from the cacophonous state of Arab-Muslim relations that a civilizational identity did not exist.

On the contrary, it is fair to say that various parts of the Muslim world, even as scattered and unharmonious as they were, felt themselves severely encroached upon by Western and non-Western forces throughout the 20th century. The overwhelming forces were cultural influences, especially political, legal, and economic. The accommodation and assimilation of those elements meant that Muslim communities had to be remade according to a very different civilizational design. It meant the remaking of Muslim societies in ways that conform to international patterns of law, economics and politics. Especially across the Middle

East, that process of assimilation and accommodation is at the heart of the present crisis.

Ever since the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood in the 1950s, the ideology of a radical separation between “East” and “West” has dominated Islamic circles, creating a profound bias against modern institutions, and hence the protracted debate in Muslims countries, continuing today, about the possibilities of imposing the *Shari’a* in some form. Even surveys of university students show significant majorities who think that imposing the *Shari’a* would be a good thing that would solve all social and economic problems.²⁸

This follows from the slogan, “Islam is the answer” that issued from the thinking of Hassan al-Banna in the first half of the 20th century. This debate is alive across the Muslim world, from Morocco to Malaysia, and from Indonesia to Turkey.²⁹ Seen from this perspective, the clash of September 11 was the tragic outcome of Islamist arguments developed in the early to mid-20th century, not the policies (however, benighted) of recent American administrations.

Nevertheless, sober Middle Eastern politicians and scholars have long recognized that there is no turning back of the clock. Western and international legal conceptions such as the territorial state, the idea of the corporate form of legal autonomy, accompanied by a clear definition of sovereignty and legitimate legal jurisdiction; constitutionalism, universal human rights, and citizenship are all part of this modern international legacy.

Part of the tragedy of the present world situation is that these *international* legal forms have been only imperfectly adopted and assimilated by Middle Eastern countries. Some young Islamists may think that their own traditions provide access to such ideas; more sober assessments of Islamic law, however, suggest otherwise.³⁰ I turn now to those issues.

Can a Civilizationalist Give Policy Advice?

Can a civilizationalist offer policy advice to the higher powers? It depends on what advice is now on offer. Here's one example that needs rethinking because it plays into the immense problem of establishing *constitutionalism, citizenship and just economic institutions* in the Muslim world today.

In a slender book titled, *The Five Front War: The Better Way to Fight Global Jihad*, Daniel Byman of the Brookings Institution presents a sober overview of the widespread terrorist networks tightly or loosely affiliated with *al-Qaeda*. He is aware of the benefits of democratic regimes and "good government," yet he seems to see more risks to advocating democratic state-building than benefits.

Wisely he notes that we need all the help that we can get from Muslim countries and therefore we ought to build more and better alliances. That means that *diplomacy* is an important tool. But then he loses sight of the importance of good government and democracy-building. For he says, "money can smooth the path..." According to Byman, "As repugnant as it might seem to American citizens, the United States will be able to bribe local politicians to maintain the alliances."³¹

Apart from the obvious immorality of such "*Realpolitik*" this advice reveals a fundamental misunderstanding of the political and ideological situation in the Muslim world, especially in the Middle East and North Africa. One does not have to read much or travel far in the Middle East to discover that, from a Middle Easterner's point of view, all the politicians, ministers, and judges in power in the Middle East and North Africa are perceived as corrupt and—this is critical—*represent the modern Western way of government and doing business*. This may be shocking to us, but the fact

is that the complex and overwhelming modern bureaucracies of the region are seen as corrupted instruments borrowed from the West that serve mainly to preserve the status quo, especially the power of the government and its officials.

Furthermore, the modern states of the Middle East have very efficient coercive apparatuses at their disposal. These include the police, secret police, an army, and sometimes multiple armies for the purpose of controlling the civilian population and rigging elections. They have modern methods of surveillance, use secret detention and routinely use torture on political dissidents. This overwhelming state apparatus, which can be found in virtually all the Arab states, especially Syria, Jordan, Egypt, Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco, leads Middle Easterners to constantly refer to that apparatus as an all-pervasive “they” who-know-all-things.

In addition, those state officials who run the countries are often seen as tied to the machinations of Washington, paid off by the latter, with lavish funds for military development and the so-called war on terror. At the same time Washington is perceived as condoning the misconduct of Middle Eastern state officials and allowing people such as Hosni Mubarak to remain in power in Egypt forever.

The view that modern western ways are a source of corruption can be found in virtually any encounter with Middle Easterners. One very pervasive aspect of the Middle Eastern distrust of modern institutions concerns elections and voting. A Moroccan colleague of mine (not very devout) said to me one day in Rabat, “I would vote for the Islamists before I would vote for *them*,” that is, the Socialist Party or others who have been in power. Here again the perception is that at least the Muslims would be honest while the others would only be interested in gaining power and enriching themselves through corruption.

Or ask a female reporter working in the Middle East: who would she rather ride with—a taxi driver who is hip, gregarious, and plays the latest pop music; or a driver who dresses in the Muslim style (beard, Muslim cap, and worry beads), displays *Quranic* verses on his dashboard, and listens to *Quranic* recitations? The first driver is more likely to flirt with the reporter, try to get her hotel address and phone number, while the second will mind his own business and be less likely to inflate the fare.

But it's not only government officials from the West who engage in these practices that subvert the integrity of public institutions in Muslim countries. *Transparency International*, the global civil society organization that publishes an index on the perception of corruption around the world, issued its annual report in September 2007 about corruption, low-income countries, and the judiciary. Focusing on the corruption of high level officials, the report says, "Bribe money often stems from multinationals based in the world's richest countries. It can no longer be acceptable for these companies to regard bribery in export markets as legitimate business strategy."³²

I would suggest that this means that the most important policy agenda for dealing with the Middle East and the *jihadis* is a straightforward program designed to strengthen constitutionalism, citizenship, the rule of law, and universal human rights. At the same time efforts must be made to establish electoral systems that guarantee, as much as is humanly possible, the regular turnover of presidents, ministers, and other public officials in truly free and public elections.

The same prescription is required to improve all the institutions of education, higher and lower. Instead of spending \$12 billion a month on a war in the Middle East,

we (Americans) need a vast program to support the creation and expansion of secular schools, the teaching of English, and the imparting of American culture at the high school level, if not before.

A good example of how beneficial this can be appeared in the New York Times very recently. Young Egyptian girls were taught English in an American-sponsored program that saw a markedly improved attitude among the girls towards the US, and a greater acceptance of the differences of others.

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Far more along these lines needs to be undertaken. Similarly, universities need to be expanded to allow students to study subjects that they wish; libraries with adequate books and professional staffs need to be provided, along with a massive translation project to bring Western books into Arabic and other Middle Eastern languages.

All such efforts need to be focused on strengthening confidence in local institutions, legal procedures, banking and economic systems, and educational training that is fully commensurate with prevailing international standards. When unemployment rates are 20 to 30% in some Middle Eastern and North African countries, it is easy to find young men willing to join a *jihad* that they see as a means of defending what is left of a Muslim civilization that they perceive as under attack from the West.

I do not want conclude with an excessively gloomy picture of the Middle East; there are some very positive things happening there that deserve our attention. But that would require another essay.

Endnotes

¹ This was the opinion expressed by Chandra Muzaffar at a Meeting of JUST, an International Human Rights group at a meeting I attended that September.

² I have discussed this case in "Freedom of Expression in the Muslim World," *Society* 42/4 May/June (2005): 62-69.

³ Ann Elizabeth Mayer, *Islam and Human Rights. Tradition and Politics*, 2ed edition (Boulder, Co: Westview Press, 1995); and Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im, *Islam the Secular State: Negotiating the Future of Shari'a* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008).

⁴ I traced out the displacement of Islamic law in the Middle East (in the nineteenth and early twentieth century) in, "On Weber, Law and Universalism: Some Preliminary Considerations," *Comparative Civilization Review* 21 (Fall) 1989: 47-79. Further discussion of that are in Huff, *The Rise of Early Modern Science: Islam, China and the West*, 2nd edition (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

⁵ A more precise definition of civilizations and civilizational analysis that I follow is in Benjamin Nelson, *On the Roads to Modernity: Conscience, Science, and Civilization*), edited by Toby E. Huff (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield, 1981), esp. chapter 5; also Toby Huff, "Is a Theory of Socio-Cultural Process Possible Without References to 'Civilizational Complexes'," *Sociological Analysis* 35 #2 (1974): 85-94; and idem, "Europe as a Civilization," in Proceedings of the *Swedish Collegium for Advanced Studies*, Uppsala, Sweden, October 2008; forthcoming.

⁶ I have discussed these deeper religious, legal, and philosophical differences in *The Rise of Early Modern Science*, especially chapters 3, 4 and 5.

⁷ For the legal side of this, see Huff, "On Weber, Law, and Universalism."

⁸ Among others see, David Fromkin, *A Peace to End All Peace: The Fall of the Ottoman Empire and the Creation of the Modern Middle East* (New York: Avon Books, 1989); and John

Keay, *Sowing the Wind. The Seeds of Conflict in the Middle East* (New York: Norton, 2003).

⁹ Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, (New York: Oxford, 1965); Niyazi Berkes, *The Development of Secularism in Turkey* (New York: Routledge, 1964); Yecim Arat, "The Project of Modernity and Women in Turkey," pp. 95-112 in *Rethinking Modernity and National Identity in Turkey*, edited by Sibel Bozdogan and Resat Kasaba (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997).

¹⁰ For the historical development, see George Makdisi, *The Rise of the College* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1981); Jonathan Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo. A Social History of Islamic Education* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); Michael Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus, 1190-1350* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994); *Schooling in Islam*, edited by Robert W. Hefner and Muhammad Qasim Zamam (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007); and Gary Leiser, "The Madrasa and the Islamization of Anatolia Before the Ottomans," in *Law and Education in Islam: Studies in Honor of Professor George Makdisi* (London: E. W. J. Gibb Memorial, 2004), pp. 174-191.)

¹¹ George Antonius, *The Arab Awakening: The Story of the Arab National Movement* (New York, Capricorn Books, 1965); but also Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798-1939* (London: Oxford University Press); idem, *A History of the Arab Peoples* (New York: Warner Books, 1992); Charles C. Adams, *Islam and Modernism in Egypt* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1968); Martin Kramer, *Islam Assembled: The Advent Muslim of the Congress* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

¹² There are many books on this subject; among the best, see Nazih Ayubi, *Political Islam. Religion and Politics in the Arab World* (London: Routledge, 1991); Richard P. Mitchell, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963); and Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi', *Intellectual Origins of Islamic Resurgence in the Modern Arab World* (Albany: SUNY University

Press, 1996); and Francois Burgat, *The Islamic Movement in North Africa*, 2nd edition (Austin, Tx: University of Texas Press, 1997).

¹³ I cannot discuss the issue here, but the whole project of “Arabization” that began in the 1970s, after the full withdrawal of French and other European powers, resulted in a movement to reestablish Arabic as the language of government and education. This had the effect of making young people in the Middle East both less cosmopolitan and international and, at the same time, much *more* Islamist. Teaching Arabic became increasing the province of teachers with strong Islamist commitments. Far fewer young people in the last thirty years of the twentieth century spoke French than previously. The trend has been noticeable in Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco. For a recent report, Michael Slackman, “In Algeria, a Tug of Wear for Young Minds,” *New York Times*, June 23, 2008, p. 1.

¹⁴ J. Spence, *In Search of Modern China* (New York: Norton, 1990).

¹⁵ Also see Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *The Ulama in Contemporary Islam. Custodians of Change*. (Princeton, 2002); and Malika Zeghal, “Religion and Politics in Egypt: The Ulema of al-Azhar, Radical Islam, and the State (1952-1994),” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 31/3 (1999): 401-27.

¹⁶ As cited in Lawrence Wright, *The Looming Tower* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2005), p. 25; from MacFarquhar, “Egyptian Group Patiently pursues Dream of Islamic State,” *New York Times* Jan 20, 2002.

¹⁷ Joyce M. Davis, *Between Jihad and Salaam. Profiles in Islam* (New York: St Martins, 1996), chapter 6.

¹⁸ See Lawrence Wright, “The Rebellion Within. Al-Qaeda Mastermind Questions Terrorism,” *The New Yorker*, June 2, 2008, pp. 37-53.

¹⁹ There is a widely held view that all Muslims should be vigilant to “promote the good and forbid wrong,” (*hisba*). Just who should enforce this command has always been unclear. This is also the term from which the “market police” derives. These

police still exist in Saudi Arabia. See Michael Cook, *Forbidding Wrong in Islam. An Introduction* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

²⁰ Alissa J. Rubin, "U.S. Remakes Jails in Iraq, but Gains Are at Risk," *New York Times*, June 2, 2008, p. 1.

²¹ See Nizar Qabbani, "The Catastrophe of Arab Defeat" (1967), in *The Middle East and Islamic World Reader*, edited by Marvin E. Gettleman and Stuart Schaar (New York: Gove Press, 2003), pp. 194-98.

²² Among others, John Alden Williams, "A Return to the Veil in Egypt," *The Middle East Review*, 11 (1979): 49-54.

²³ This trend has been described in considerable detail by Genevieve Abdo, *No God But God. Egypt and the Triumph of Islam* (New York: Oxford, 2000); and by Carrie Wickham Rosefsky, *Mobilizing Islam: Religion, Activism, and Political Change in Egypt* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

²⁴ See Francois Burgat, *The Islamic Movement in North Africa* (Austin, Tx: University of Texas Press, 1997), 2nd edition; and Malika Zeghal, *Islamism in Morocco: Religion, Authoritarianism, and Electoral Politics* (Princeton, New Jersey: Markus Wiener, 2008).

²⁵ See Brynjar Lia, *Architect of Global Jihad. The Life of al-Qaida Strategist Abu Mus'ab al-Suri* (New York: Columbia University press, 2008); Lawrence Wright, *The Looming Tower*; and Gilles Kepel and Jean-Pierre Milelli, *Al-Qaeda in Its Own Words* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008).

²⁶ For a very informed and readable account of contemporary Iran, women, politics and the chador, see Elaine Sciolino, *Persian Mirrors. The Elusive Face of Iran* (New York: Free Press, 2000).

²⁷ There are reasons for thinking that the ideological foundations supporting the al-Qaeda movement have now been severely undercut, but only time will tell; see Lawrence Wright, "The Rebellion Within. Al-Qaeda mastermind questions terrorism," *The New Yorker*, June 2, 2008, pp. 36-53.

²⁸ Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992) p. 228.

²⁹ Nulifer Göle, *The Forbidden Modern* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1996); Laurie Brand, *Women, the State, and Political Liberalization. Middle Eastern and North African Experiences* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998); Ziba Mir Hosseini, *Islam and Gender. The Religious Debate in Contemporary Iran* (Princeton University Press, 1999); Robert Hefner, *Civil Islam* (Princeton: Princeton, University Press, 2000); and now Abdullahi An-Na'im, *Islam and the Secular State: Negotiating the Future of Shari'a* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008).

³⁰ Among others see Ann Elizabeth Mayer, *Islam and Human Rights. Tradition and Politics*. 2ed ed. (Boulder, Co: Westview Press, 1995), and Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im, *Islam and the Secular State: Negotiating the Future of Shari'a* (Harvard University Press, 2008).

³¹ Daniel Byman, *The Five Front War. The Better Way to Fight Global Jihad* (New York: John Wiley, 2008), p. 222.

³² Transparency International, *Global Corruption Report 2007* http://www.transparency.org/publications/publications/gcr_2007, p. 2.

³³ Michael Slackman, "A New Tongue to Win Hearts and Minds," *New York Times*, February 6, 2009, p. A11.