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# Tony Blankley, *The West's Last Chance: Will We Win the Clash of Civilizations?*

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**BOOK REVIEWS****Tony Blankley, *The West's Last Chance: Will We Win the Clash of Civilizations?* Washington DC: Regency Publishing, 2005**

Tony Blankley, onetime speechwriter for Ronald Reagan and current editorial page editor for the Washington Times, argues that the West has entered an existential crisis. It began with the loss of morale after the First World War. It has become acute with the launching of a jihad against the West. The jihad is transnational, but its most dangerous components are based among the burgeoning Muslim populations in Western lands, and particularly in Europe. Blankley is a naturalized American citizen of English origin, and his proposed remedies are Churchillian: total mobilization to defeat a threat to Western civilization.

Blankley touches on the nature of Islamist ideology, the demographic weakness of Europe, and the relationship of jihad to culture war. Although the author is usually accounted a conservative, he is not an American nationalist. Neither is he a realist or a neo-isolationist, or a neoconservative universalist. The book speaks from a perspective that is still quite rare: the political and cultural unit he seeks to protect is the West, which at the least includes both America and Europe:

“The binding traditions of language, religion, history, politics, foods, styles of life, and love of individual freedom are sufficient to form a lasting alliance between Americans and Europeans, from Boise to Budapest, from Chicago to Seville. The historic force of the Islamic insurgency, if nothing else, should hammer us back into a common sword that we can call the West.”

The book emphasizes that the most important features of Islamism are 20<sup>th</sup> century products of an ideological reaction against Western modernity. Before the foundation of Israel and long before the United States became a dominant factor in Middle Eastern politics, Sayyid Qutb formulated the reaction as a jeremiad aimed specifically at the United States. Islamism departs from the traditions of Islamic societies in many ways. Jihad in its military sense was traditionally a collective enterprise that could be launched only by competent religious authority; Islamism makes it a personal duty.

The jihadists have removed the West, and particularly Europe, from the category of Dar al-Suhl, the land of truce, to the category Dar al-Harb, the land of war. The distinction is not theoretical, since there are now large and growing Islamic communities throughout Europe. Partly

because of internal resistance, partly because of the ideology of multiculturalism, these communities are not integrating to their host countries. Those countries, one and all, have fertility rates below the replacement level. The term "Eurabia" has been coined to describe the Europe that would exist in the second half of this century if these trends continue. Here is Blankley's most extreme statement of the danger:

"In an odd way, we are in a situation similar to that which confronted the American Indians when European explorers landed on their shores. From North America to South America, the Indians vastly outnumbered the intruders. But the Europeans were not exactly an army, and warfare did not exactly break out. Instead, both sides seemed almost friendly and cooperative at times. Had the Europeans been seen as a threat, the Indians could have slaughtered them in short order. Even with their guns, there were only a few hundred Europeans, while there were hundreds of thousands of Indians."

An Islamic Europe, even a Europe merely cowed into diplomatic and cultural submission by large Muslim minorities, would be as intolerable a threat to the United States as a Nazi or a Soviet Europe would have been. However, all these bad things will happen only "if present trends continue," and Blankley is aware that trends usually do not continue. He has little regard for any analysis that likens the current condition of the West to that of the later Roman Empire:

"The history of a nation, people, or a civilization is not linear; nor is it a predictable cycle in the sense that a nation arises, becomes vigorous and develops its classic form, then succumbs to excess, then decadence, and finally death. Such intellectual constructs are too neat. They are often historically contradicted. China has repeatedly emerged from decadence back to youthful vigor, as she is doing currently."

Blankley paraphrases Toynbee without citing him: "Challenge and response, not continuity, describe the progress of human affairs." The metahistory in this book, however, most resembles that of Neil Strauss and William Howe, who devised a popular model of American history based on cycles of generations. Again without citation, Blankley applies the model to the whole West:

"The cycle [today] would seem to be completing itself as it so often does in human history. Victory [in 1945], delivered by certain values, yielded prosperity that permitted individualistic caprice, indulgence, overconfidence, excess...permitted danger to arise again and calls for certain values to overcome. As the [baby] boomers were present at the inception of the prosperity and safety cycle, so they will be present at

the end of the cycle in the beginning of the danger-driven renewal.”

By the end of the Second World War, Blankley explains, the traditional patriotism and cultural pride of Western countries had been discredited. And so, with great good will, and with considerable success, the leading spirits of Europe set about to create a cosmopolitan society. Europe would become a continent without borders. Justice and plenty would be provided by rational, secular administration. No culture would be preferred to another. All these plans rested on a flawed assumption, however:

“The linchpin of this entire gorgeous edifice -- now already 2/3 constructed -- was an ever-growing, assimilated, law-abiding Muslim European population. Only a steady tide of high-birthrate Muslims could fill the ever-expanding population gap caused by the dearth of indigenous European babies. Only with these young increasingly productive Muslim workers could Europe afford the social welfare system it had given itself. Only with these able and law-abiding workers could Europe economically compete with America and Asia in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and beyond.”

This is not going to happen. Neither, probably, will Eurabia happen. One of two things will stop the latter. Western elites might understand the magnitude of their peril and take the sort of steps to meet it that Blankley discusses in the second half of his book. The other possibility is that native European populations will take matters into their own hands, leading to an age of ethnic cleansing and civil war.

According to Blankley, 2004 was the decisive year. The slaughter of the school children in Beslan; the train-bombings in Madrid; and most of all, the gruesome murder of Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh: these events demonstrated to high and low alike that universalist Europe had failed. Blankley gives hopeful coverage to evidence that elite opinion, and even fashionable opinion is turning against the ideology of multiculturalism. Members of the Green parties, for instance, have taken to demonstrating against the traditional celebration of the feast of Eid al-Adha, because it involves the slaughter of lambs and goats. Even the French establishment, so quick to cater to supposed Muslim sentiment in diplomatic matters, now seems determined to hold fast against the intrusion of Islam into the public square, lest the French tradition of laicism be undermined.

This brings us to the question of religion in the West, and what role it might play in defeating the Islamist threat. At one point, Blankley states, “The West needs to recover its fighting faith.” He notes the sta-

tistical correlation between high levels of religious practice and those cultural traits that he believes the West needs to survive, such as fertility rates above the replacement level, patriotism, and a capacity for moral outrage. He also observes that the widely noted difference between America and Europe in the level of religious belief is probably not as great as is generally thought. The real difference is that public agnosticism is expected among elites in much of Europe (one thinks of Prime Minister Blair skulking off to Catholic Mass when no one is looking), whereas a show of piety is good form in most of the United States.

The author is aware that some of the strongest opposition to Islamism now comes from secularists. However, he points out that secularism is a historical anomaly, and may not be sustainable. A religious revival is more likely. If the immediate future resembles the troubled years between 1914 and 1945, then the sheer growth in hardship could drive people to spiritual comfort. He also cites some speculation by neurologists that religion may be hardwired into the brain, and so will always reassert itself.

We know that there will be hardships, Blankley argues, because economic efficiency will soon cease to be the governing criterion in international relations:

“Eventually it will dawn on Western leaders and public opinion that it would be safer to keep some distance between the West and Islam. Everything from Internet connections to immigration, to tourism, to business, to trade will be more carefully controlled if not partially disconnected. Each restraint on the free flow of people, material, and words will act to marginally damage our economies.”

Even more important, the liberal West must recognize that, in Oliver Wendell Holmes’s words, “The Bill of Rights is not a suicide pact,” and that survival is the first right:

“It is increasingly likely that such a threat cannot be defeated while the West continues to adhere to its deeply held values -- as it currently understands them -- of tolerance, the right to privacy, the right even to advocate sedition, and the right to equal protection under the law. The day is upon us when the West will have to decide which it values more: granting these rights and tolerance to those who wish to destroy us, or the survival of Western civilization. And this is another reason the West has been slow to react -- because reacting violates its own values.”

Blankley reminds us that the Allied governments during World War II were willing to subject classes of people to special security measures. The internment of American citizens of Japanese origin is the best-

known example, but even larger numbers of other ethnic groups were affected. Many were forced to move or sell their property. Aliens from enemy countries were often deported; naturalized citizens sometimes lost their citizenship. Blankley recites this history without deploring it. The beginning of wisdom, he suggests, is to embrace the practice of ethnic profiling.

The governments of the West can no longer afford to be equally tolerant of all religions, we are told. The author recalls a Supreme Court decision from 1940 that approved the expulsion of the children of religious sectarians from school because the children refused to recite the Pledge of Allegiance. (Note that this was before the Pledge contained the words "under God," the occasion of current legal attacks on the Pledge.) The Court was not impressed by the fact that the families of the children belonged to a denomination that refused to swear allegiance to any secular government. For the Court, the government was well within its rights in insisting that schools instill loyalty and a sense of national unity among school children. If Blankley has his way, government will soon again insist on no less.

The book makes other proposals, among the least extreme of which is that serious security measures cannot be implemented without the creation of a national identity card. That would be part of a larger process of internal surveillance that would include taking effective control of the borders. Presumably, the need to track aliens domestically would also rule out a guest-worker program of any great size. The most conceptually interesting proposal, however, is for a declaration of war.

Blankley does not often criticize the Bush Administration in detail, but he deplors its failure to articulate the threat. It's not a war on terror. It's not a war on Islam. It's a war on Islamists who seek to subvert the governments of the West and coerce their policies through terror. A declaration of war would clarify the matter. It would also allow the sort of emergency regime that obtained during the 20<sup>th</sup> century world wars to take effect. Blankley is aware that liberty would not prosper if the measures he is proposing became normal. That is why he suggests that the declaration of war contain a sunset provision. Congress might consider every two years, for instance, whether to renew the declaration.

When this book appeared in the late summer of 2005, Blankley acknowledged that the leaders and the peoples of the West were not nearly frightened enough to implement the policy he outlined. However, he was confident that subsequent events would provide the necessary motivation. Within a few weeks, Subsequent Events flowed thick and

fast. By the time you read this, we will have a clearer idea whether public policy will react as he anticipated.

**John J. Reilly**