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# Muslim Perceptions of Injustice as an International Relations Question

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## Abstract

*This article argues that political instability and conflict in the Middle East and the larger Muslim world are caused by perceived marginalization and systematic injustice suffered by Muslim societies both at the domestic and international levels. In contrast to essentialist explanations of political instability in the Muslim world, the article calls for an institutional explanation, highlighting destabilizing effects of political marginalization especially in an increasingly globalized world. Exclusion of Muslim societies from international authority structures is a direct result of fragmentation of political authority and lack of democracy in the Muslim world. Western theories of International Relations are ill-fitted to explain the contribution of perceptions of civilizational injustice because they emerged within a statist and materialist paradigm. Muslim critics differ fundamentally from these approaches in that they see justice rather than order as the basis of a lasting world peace.*

## Key Words

Islam, international system, peace, civilizational justice, democracy, the United Nations, globalization.

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## Introduction

The brutal murder by two Muslims of twelve journalists and policemen at the office of the satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* in Paris created shock waves across Europe and the world. Since then numerous similar incidents have occurred. The radical terror groups such as ISIS been able to recruit militants from more than eighty countries from Indonesia to Morocco, from Australia to Spain. Most of its recruits are urban, young and educated. The question of what drives these individuals, who would otherwise be seeking normal life-styles and successful professional careers, to travel to a conflict zone and join a terrorist organization is an important analytical puzzle. The conventional responses offered by essentialist approaches draw our attention to what it regards as the violent core character of Islam that leads its young adherents to radicalism. In this view, it is the text of the religion which shapes and guides action. In the Muslim world, a similar approach asserts that violence is a result of the prevalence of a certain interpretation of religion. If it is replaced by “the real Islam” or alternatively a more

reformist interpretation of Islamic texts, the crisis would be solved. In contrast to such simplistic but nevertheless commonplace accounts, this article asserts that the explanations should be sought at the level of material factors. The text gains meaning only in the specific structural and institutional context in which it is read and interpreted. The root of the problem lies therefore in the absence of participatory institutions both at the local and international level. The widespread perception in the Muslim world is that they are subject to a systematic domestic and international injustice but are denied participatory mechanisms to voice their grievances. The absence of democracy at the domestic level in the majority of Muslim countries means that public perceptions are often not represented by their states. Furthermore, the fragmented political structure of the Muslim world results in the absence of Muslim participation in key international organizations.

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Participant units of the contemporary international system are states and often the states are themselves the principal

causes of conflicts and wars. In the context of the Muslim world, where authoritarianism is the norm and democracy is a rare exception, states lack the crucial linkage with their societies to credibly represent them at the international level. At the same time, the United Nations is built upon an undemocratic system which grants five of its members veto power over decisions concerning major international crises. Major conflicts where their direct interests are at stake remain unaddressed and justice will be rendered only in specific cases where they do not have conflictual positions. As the Syrian case demonstrates, authoritarian leaders may enjoy protection of one or more of the permanent members of the Security Council and human rights violations are therefore seldom addressed. For more than six decades, the UN Security Council has failed to address the question of Palestine in a fair and forceful manner precisely because major powers offer unquestionable support to Israel. Especially since the end of the Cold War, Muslim populations in numerous locations have experienced civil wars, communal violence, and oppression by their states, but these issues are not raised by any major power and brought to the agenda for international decision-making. The lack of a permanent Muslim-majority member of the UN Security Council despite the fact that Muslims represent the largest civilizational category without this member-

ship is the pressing question facing the international system. Discussions about the expansion of the Security Council are often about the inclusion of India or Brazil as new permanent members but they are rarely about the issue of *Muslim* representation. The obvious reason for this omission is the fact that the legitimate unit of analysis in international politics is the state rather than religious groups or civilizational categories. Basically the question of representation confronting Muslims as a civilizational category is caused by severe political fragmentation of the Muslim world in that there is no larger Muslim state having a population capable of enforcing itself as a significant political power playing a major international role and legitimately demanding participatory position. In its absence, genuine Muslim political grievances are simply ignored by international powers.

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The goal of this article is to call for a re-thinking of the root causes of political violence in the Muslim world. It aims to locate the issue in the political context, presenting a perspective that is

focused both on domestic and international dimensions of the question of representation. The central argument is that sources of political violence are rooted not in a specific culture or religion but in the perceived absence of representation and denial of voice, both at the level of domestic and international system. Hence, the recruitment ability of militant Islamist movements cannot be explained solely by reference to religion or a particular interpretation of religion. It is deeply rooted in the domestic and global political context which suppresses demands of Muslim masses to voice their grievances. In the words of Richard Falk, the discourse of globalization without a fair civilizational participation is nothing more than “false universalism.”<sup>1</sup> As rapidly globalizing, increasingly urban and educated Muslim societies demand political participation not only at the domestic but also at the global level, along with the failure to channel such demands into peaceful political participation through democratic decision-making mechanisms, a strong backlash is created.

Samuel Huntington’s clash of civilizations has certainly challenged the traditional statist IR paradigm, but in the way he locates the source of international conflict in the inherent character of civilizations, most particularly Islam, he falls into the trap of essentialism. Yet accepting the validity of civilizations as significant identity categories does not

necessarily translate into believing in the inevitability of a civilizational clash. This article locates the source of conflict in the way Muslim populations are excluded from domestic and global representative mechanisms. The inability of domestic and international political institutions to represent their voices and grievances feeds into a deep sense of injustice among Muslim societies, thereby contributing to the socio-psychological background of political violence.

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The article starts with a discussion of Huntington's theory of clash of civilizations, and elaborates on how his essentialist explanations regarding the cause of conflict contradicts with his earlier institutionalist approach, which ironically, offers a more accurate explanation. Similarly, mainstream IR theories do not address the issue of civilizational justice, as notions of civilization and justice are outside of their analytical framework that focuses on peace as maintenance of stability and order. In contrast, critical-minded scholars of Muslim background offer an alternative concept of peace not

as the absence of conflict and war but as a condition stemming from the presence of justice. In the current structure in which Muslims suffer from a severe fragmentation of political authority and denial of democracy, essential prerequisites for peace are missing.

## The Clash of Civilizations or the Crisis of Representation?

Samuel Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations?* presents a powerful challenge to the statist paradigm on which both actual international politics and theoretical thinking about international relations are based.<sup>2</sup> Huntington believes that the future conflicts in the world will be primarily among civilizations, which include Western, Latin American, African, Islamic, Sinic, Hindu, Orthodox, Buddhist and Japanese civilizations. In his prediction, "nation states will remain the most powerful actors in world affairs, but the principal conflicts of global politics will occur between nations and groups of different civilizations. The clash of civilizations will dominate global politics. The fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future."<sup>3</sup> Huntington's clash of civilizations has been influential not because of the value and consistency of his claims and arguments but rather because of the enormous political impact it created in the context of the post-Soviet Balkan conflicts. Many critics note that Huntington predicts

the effects that his discourse itself has created, thus engaging in a self-fulfilling prophecy.<sup>4</sup> Henderson and Tucker refute the empirical accuracy of Huntington's claims by asserting that most of the pre-Cold War and Cold War conflicts took place among states belonging to the same civilizational groups and the civilizational membership has not played any role in the post-Cold War interstate conflicts.<sup>5</sup> Yet others see that the terrorist attacks of 9/11 and the ever increasing frequency of political violence and terrorism in the Muslim world prove his arguments.<sup>6</sup>

Furthermore, *the Clash of Civilizations* offers a strong criticism to the idea that there is one single, universal civilization. He accepts other cultural units as authentic civilizations but does not see them as capable of grasping liberal Western values. In this sense the attempt by the West to export its liberal values is not only futile but more significantly it creates a reaction by allowing the Others to perceive the West as imperialist.<sup>7</sup> Here Huntington repeats the conventional essentialist discourse which sees traditional Muslim societies developing a cultural reaction to the effects of modernization and globalization that bring to them liberal Western values. He fails to acknowledge that anti-Western reaction is not due to democratization and liberalization of Muslim societies but rather postponement and denial of these processes due to repeated outside interventions. In Huntington's frank expression, "the West

won the world not by the superiority of its ideas or values or religion [...] but rather by its superiority in applying organized violence. Westerners often forget this fact; non-Westerners never do."<sup>8</sup>

While *the Clash of Civilizations* has received a sharp reaction from most academics and intellectuals, it has created an undeniably strong impact outside the scholarly boundaries. Undoubtedly, he has succeeded to provoke attempts to find a place for the notion of civilization within the IR theory.<sup>9</sup> Yet the mainstream IR theory has stayed away from integrating this concept into its analytical framework. For the most part, IR theories accept states as the major organizing and building blocks of international politics. Two leading theories of International Relations, Realism and Liberalism, differ only in terms of their view about the nature of the state, its characteristics and its behavior, but not about its primacy in international politics. Civilization, however, is fuzzy, ambiguous, and, most significantly, lacks explicit agency.<sup>10</sup>

Interestingly Huntington comes from a pioneering institutionalist background of explaining the roots of chaos in changing societies. Yet his theoretical orientation gradually shifted from institutionalism to culturalism and civilizational essentialism. In its theoretical orientation, *the Clash of Civilizations* represents a dramatic shift from two of his previous, more academically-oriented works: the *Political Order in Changing Societies* and *the Third Wave*.<sup>11</sup>

*The Political Order in Changing Societies* demonstrated the destabilizing effects of economic modernization when it is not coupled with political modernization. Economic modernization creates an empowered society and increased societal demands for political change. Huntington predicts that when this modernization is not followed by a parallel process of political institutionalization or democratization, the outcome will be societal conflict. As Huntington explains,

Social and economic change—urbanization, increases in literacy and education, industrialization, mass media expansion—extend political consciousness, multiply political demands, broaden political participation. These changes undermine traditional sources of political authority and traditional political institutions. ...The rates of social mobilization and the expansion of political participation are high; the rates of political organization and institutionalization are low. The result is political instability and disorder. The primary problem of politics is the lag in the development of political institutions behind social and economic change.<sup>12</sup>

In 1968, Huntington's interest was the effects of modernization at the domestic level. Yet his theory can easily be applied to the global level to explain the effects of globalization. Globalization aggravates and expands the scope of the effects of modernization; it leads to increased access by societal groups to global education and media, ultimately increasing political expectations for political participation. Now instead of the national media, we talk about global and interactive

social media which renders authoritarian state control on information ineffective. In line with Huntington's predictions, these expectations are accompanied by effective participatory institutions at the international level, the outcome will be global disorder and violence.<sup>13</sup>

In *the Third Wave*, Huntington avoids to some extent cultural determinism and presents cultures as dynamic and complex categories. He acknowledges the existence of some inherent cultural obstacles in Islam to democratization, most significantly the absence of secularism and the values in these cultural traditions that are congruent with the principles of democracy such as egalitarianism and voluntarism.<sup>14</sup> In the process, cultural features that are in agreement with democracy can supersede those that are unfavorable to it. In other words, a cultural transformation is possible if requisite institutional structures are in place.

Three years before the publication of Huntington's article, the renowned Orientalist Bernard Lewis saw a civilizational conflict between Islam and the West, which he described as an ancient conflict: "We are facing a mood and a movement far transcending the level of issues and policies and the governments that pursue them. This is no less than a clash of civilizations— the perhaps irrational but surely historic reaction of an ancient rival against our Judeo-Christian heritage, our secular present, and the worldwide expansion of both."<sup>15</sup>

**Dominant IR theories are ill-fitted to explain the role of civilizational identity and civilizational justice in causing conflict and peace.**

Like Lewis, Huntington sees the root of the conflict in unchanging, essential characteristics and belief-system of Islam. In his view, Islam has an inherent propensity to violence due to its militarism and its inability to coexist with non-Muslims. He states, "Islam's borders are bloody and so are its innards. The fundamental problem for the West is not Islamic fundamentalism. It is Islam, a different civilization whose people are convinced of the superiority of their culture and are obsessed with the inferiority of their power."<sup>16</sup> In contrast, Western civilization is uniquely characterized by values and institutions including pluralism, individualism, democracy, the rule of law, human rights, and cultural freedom.<sup>17</sup> He rejects that Western colonialism and post-colonial imperialism have anything to do with the production of violence. Yet he recognizes the absence of core Muslim states providing central authority as a contributing factor to the prevalence of conflict: "Islam is a source of instability in the world because it lacks a dominant center. States aspiring to be leaders of Islam, such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, Pakistan, Turkey, and potentially Indonesia, compete for influence in the Muslim

world; no one of them is in a strong position to mediate conflicts within Islam; and no one of them is able to act authoritatively on behalf of Islam in dealing with conflicts between Muslim and non-Muslim groups."<sup>18</sup>

Huntington refuses to associate this fragmented power structure and the absence of a dominant political authority in the Muslim world with imperialism. Neither does he acknowledge the role of the civilizationally undemocratic decision-making structure of the international system, which inherently fails to address legitimate political grievances of Muslim masses. As Abdullahi an-Na'im maintains, while the actual perpetrators of political violence may be small in number, there is always a widespread sympathy and support by a much larger number of people at the mass level, and this will not end unless the grievances of the wider constituency are addressed. For an effective conflict resolution, "it is necessary to try our utmost to understand and respond to the underlying injustice that may make any wider community sympathetic to the claims of terrorists, without conceding those claims as such or accepting that terrorism can ever be a legitimate or justified means of redressing any perceived grievances. The most compelling example of this is the occupation and humiliation, loss of land and humanity suffered by Palestinians."<sup>19</sup>

## “Civilizational Justice” as a Missing Concept in IR Theory Debates

Dominant IR theories are ill-fitted to explain the role of civilizational identity and civilizational justice in causing conflict and peace. There are two reasons for this. First, they emphasize material interests, order and stability over normative values including human rights and justice. Furthermore, mainstream IR theories, particularly realism, are based on a statist paradigm of international politics and a fluid, non-material and extra-territorial concept like civilizational identity is hard to integrate into their analytical framework.

Moral concepts such as justice and equality are not among the core interests of mainstream IR theories. In these approaches, the crucial linkage between justice and peace is missing. Realists believe that peace is caused by balance of power in an anarchic international system; Liberals hold that international organizations mitigate the effects of anarchy and contribute to cooperation among states. Hans Morgenthau, founder of classical realism, famously states, “international politics is a struggle for power.”<sup>20</sup> Universal moral principles do not apply to actions of states in the autonomous realm of politics, which dictates rational pursuit of interests defined as power.<sup>21</sup> There is simply no contradic-

tion between rationality and morality, as “the rationally right and the ethically good are identical.”<sup>22</sup> State leaders might have ulterior goals defined in terms of religious, philosophic or social ideals. “But whenever they strive to realize their goal by means of international politics, they do so by striving for power.”<sup>23</sup> Hence dictates of rationality and power politics reign supreme. In structural realism, most prominently espoused by Kenneth Waltz, the anarchical nature of the international system dictates rationality in foreign policy decisions. The system ensures that the primary motivation of states is survival and states do not differentiate among other states when it comes to security.<sup>24</sup> Cultural commonalities or civilizational identity do not create a special bond between states as moral considerations are secondary to security priorities.

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In contrast to realism which sees states as undifferentiated units regardless of their domestic society, culture, and in-



stitutional structures, liberalism has a culture-specific bias accepting “the distinctiveness of interstate relations among modern Western states.”<sup>25</sup> Liberalism holds that behavior of states is determined by state preferences, which are shaped by domestic societal actors, public opinion, interest groups as well as political and economic systems. State preferences emerge as an outcome of conflict of interests among societal actors and interest groups to shape foreign policy. In liberalism, such societal groups, including identity-based groups, are construed as rational units, competing against each other to shape state preferences in order to serve their interests. Hence a liberal conception of the state is materialist and unable to account for non-material sources of conflict. Yet in contrast to realism which sees all states as equally capable of acting rationally, liberalism has a definite cultural bias in believing in the superiority of liberal values and institutions in generating peace.

The role of civilizational identity in international politics could best be explained by constructivism as a theoretical approach that incorporates non-material factors. However, statist and structuralist interpretations of constructivism including the one espoused by Alexander Wendt do not attempt to explain collective identity formations at the societal and individual levels.<sup>26</sup> Statist constructivism explores common identity build-

ing processes among states. Formation of civilizational identity, however, is a societal and individual process, as those who feel belonging to a civilizational identity are individuals rather than states. In fact, civilizational identity may work against the national-identity building process, by forcing minorities within a larger cultural system to identify with an external identity. Young European Muslims facing difficulties of integration may feel alienated from the cultural system in which they live and seek an external identity that offers them cultural self-confidence and feelings of superiority.

Employing Johan Galtung’s terminology, both Realism and Liberalism understand peace as the absence of war (*negative peace*), rather than having a positive content of justice, human rights and the constructive resolution of conflict (*positive peace*). As Galtung states, “*structural positive peace* would substitute freedom for repression and equity for exploitation, and then reinforce this with *dialogue* instead of penetration, *integration* instead of segmentation, *solidarity* instead of fragmentation, and *participation* instead of marginalization.”<sup>27</sup>

Mainstream IR theories think of peace in terms of the absence of war rather than as stemming from justice mainly because of the materialist ontology on which they are based. Despite their claims for objectivity and universality, theories of International Relations reflect a para-

digm of thinking and perspective on the way international relations are conducted or should be conducted normatively. As Robert Cox states, “theory is always for someone and for some purpose. All theories have a perspective. Perspectives derive from a position in time and space, specifically social and political time and space...There is, accordingly, no such thing as theory in itself, divorced from a standpoint in time and space. When any theory so represents itself, it is the more important to examine it as ideology, and to lay bare its concealed perspective.”<sup>28</sup> The theories that came to be dominant in the literature after the Second World War were ideological perspectives on international politics. They primarily reflected how international politics looked from the perspective of the major powers, particularly the United States. Hence their primary emphasis has been stability and security rather than reform or change. According to Acharya and Buzan, realism, liberalism and even alternative approaches like the English School speak for the status quo great powers and the maintenance of their position in the international system.<sup>29</sup> When it is applied to the domestic political realm, Islamic political theory, particularly developed in later stages, similarly emphasizes order and stability as important values and calls for avoidance of anarchy and chaos. Political authority is valued as it provides security and protection, maintains legal order, and safeguards the rights of indi-

viduals and groups.<sup>30</sup> Yet, an Islamic paradigm of politics also highlights justice as the basis of and prerequisite for peace. As Khadduri states, “any public order devoid of justice tends to breed tension and conflicts, and therefore would undermine and ultimately destroy the foundation on which peace is established. Yet in human experience, justice proved so compelling a goal in some societies that its pursuit often prompted men to break the peace. In the relationship among nations, peace proved to be the proximate, but justice is the ultimate objective, if public order were ever to endure.”<sup>31</sup>

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Islam’s conception of peace is at odds with Realism’s prioritization of order over justice. Realism asserts that justice cannot be materialized in the absence of order whereas Islamic tradition sees a wrong order as constituting injustice.<sup>32</sup> In an Islamic theory of International Relations, as developed by Abu Sulayman, justice is ranked before peace among the cardinal principles of such a theory.<sup>33</sup> In his introduction to Abu Sulayman’s book, the late Palestinian-American scholar Ismail R. al-Faruqi writes that there is a strong need in the world today for an

international order that would establish a just and permanent peace. This world order would be “without tyranny, one which recognizes the differences and distinctions- religious, cultural, social, and economic- of the peoples of the world as legitimate, and that would found its law upon their common need to order their lives as they wish in justice and freedom.”<sup>34</sup> As stated by Kelsay, the Islamic tradition accepts peace not as the avoidance of strife or the absence of war, but as emerging from the struggle for a just social order.<sup>35</sup> Hence the Islamic paradigm considers justice as a higher ranking value than a mere absence of war. The present international system, the core institution of which is the United Nations, prioritizes order over justice. According to Hashmi, the UN Charter places greater emphasis on values of sovereignty, order, and peace over individual or collective rights and justice.<sup>36</sup> Similarly, Ali Mazrui believes that the UN Charter reflects “a Christian tendency to regard peace and ‘love’ as an answer to the scourge of war,” whereas the Islamic ethical system rests not on the commandment to love, but on the struggle for justice.<sup>37</sup>

According to Davutoğlu, Muslim societies have lost their confidence in the international system as a result of perceived neglect of their issues and unfair treatment.

Richard Falk provides a powerful criticism of both statist IR theories and Huntington’s theory clash of civilizations. While employing civilizational analysis, he disagrees with Huntington as to why civilizational conflict takes place. For Falk, the absence of Muslim participation in key international organizations and decision-making processes contributes to a widespread Muslim perception of exclusion. Moreover, this absence contributes to an anti-Islamic bias in addressing the controversial issues concerning Muslim populations.<sup>38</sup> Falk refers to Ahmet Davutoğlu’s criticism of international system’s treatment of political crises in the Muslim world. According to Davutoğlu, Muslim societies have lost their confidence in the international system as a result of perceived neglect of their issues and unfair treatment:

The Muslim masses are feeling insecure in relation to the functioning of the international system because of the double standards in international affairs. The expansionist policy of Israel has been tolerated by the international system... The international organizations, which are very sensitive to the rights of small minorities in Muslim countries, did not respond against the sufferings of the Muslim minorities in India, the former Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Kashmir Burma, etc. The atomic powers in some Muslim countries like Pakistan and Kazakhstan have been declared a danger when such weapons have been accepted as the internal affairs of other states such as Israel and India. Muslims, who make up about 25 % of the world’s population, have no permanent member in the Security Council and all appeals from

the Muslim world are being vetoed by one of the permanent members. The Muslim masses have lost their confidence in the international system as a neutral problem-solver after the experiences of the last decade.<sup>39</sup>

Echoing a similar perspective, former Iranian President Mohammad Khatami objects to the undemocratic nature of the UN system: “Why should a few countries have privileges because they won the last world war and have more power, and why should they be able to use the institutions and tools created in the United Nations for promoting peace and understating to impose their demands and interests?”<sup>40</sup> Among other Muslim leaders, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, President of Turkey, offers one of sharpest criticisms of the way the international system has responded to conflicts such as Palestine and the way the UN security system is structured. As Erdoğan asserts, the exclusive veto power system creates an unfair situation as their decisions often negate the will of the UN body. The resulting frustration causes despair: “the double standards of the modern world create a deep lack of trust for the people. This distrust tarnishes the perception of justice and leads millions of people to fall into despair... Quicker and more effective mechanisms should be formed for the solution of global and regional problems, and the U.N. should act bravely when it comes to the defending of the right.”<sup>41</sup>

Naturally, the absence of Muslim states in key international organizations

can be explained and justified from a purely statist power-based perspective by referring to the absence of any qualifying Muslim majority state in terms of population, size of economy or military power. Likewise, from a perspective that rejects the validity of multiple civilizational categories, there is simply no issue on which the West is represented by three countries and the Muslim world, with a population of 1.6 billion, does not have a permanent member at the UN Security Council. Even then, one needs to explain why Indonesia is excluded despite having almost the combined population of three of the five permanent UN Security Council members- France, the United Kingdom, and Russia. At the same time, the case of India and Brazil, as the largest members of Huntington’s other non-Western civilizations, should also be discussed. Certainly the severe political fragmentation of the Muslim world contributes to the absence of Muslim representation in the global decision-making processes. Economic and political reintegration of the Muslim world leading to a unified political authority in the same way Europe has achieved integration would only be possible with democratization. Yet the suppression of democratic aspirations in the Muslim world by domestic regimes in collaboration with international powers, primarily the West, alienates the Muslim masses and destroys their optimism about their futures. Clearly, the present fragmented

political structure in the Muslim world has been an outcome of colonialist power structures.

## Two Sources of Perceptions of Civilizational Injustice in the Muslim World

### *Colonialism and Fragmentation of Political Authority*

In the map of civilizations drawn by Samuel Huntington, the modern Islamic world appears to be the most fragmented, competing in this matter with Africa and Latin America. Other civilizational categories are characterized by the presence of dominant states or politically and economically integrated blocs. The United States and European Union, China, Russia, and India are building blocs of the civilizations which Huntington accepts they belong to. In the case of Islam, the picture is that of an extreme political fragmentation, which is a contradiction given Islam's strong emphasis on the notion of one Muslim community (*ummah*).

In this new balance of power, Muslim lands were integrated into the global economy as colonies and suppliers of raw materials for European industries, as well as consumers of European finished products.

As noted by Hashmi, the fragmentation of Muslim political perspectives started soon after the death of Prophet Muhammad, over the question of leadership.<sup>42</sup> In Islamic history, numerous Muslim empires simultaneously contested not only over territory, but also over the title of Caliphate and the claim to legitimately represent the entire *ummah*. Yet the post-colonial political structure of the Muslim world is unprecedented in its level of political fragmentation. Despite the Crusaders and the Mongol invasions, the change in political power from Arabs to Turkic rulers, and the loss of Muslim control in the Iberian Peninsula, the overall balance of power long remained in favor of the Muslim side. This picture drastically changed with the advent of modern colonialism and industrialization in Europe, leading to a complete dominance of the West over the Muslim world. In this new balance of power, Muslim lands were integrated into the global economy as colonies and suppliers of raw materials for European industries, as well as consumers of European finished products.

Muslim attempts to resist territorial dissolution and integration into the Euro-centric global economic system through reform and defensive modernization not only largely failed, but also, more significantly, such attempts augmented the situation of dependency because they could be financed through cash crops sold to Europe as well as by

European financing.<sup>43</sup> The advent of Russia as the challenger to European colonial powers ended the long history of the British-French conflict. They chose to support the Ottoman empire against Russian expansionism, but this support often came in exchange for trade concessions, which allowed for further market penetration of European powers into the Empire. Later the unification of Germany changed all of these calculations and led to Britain, France and Russia coming together in an attempt to deny Germany's advance into the Ottoman Middle East. Deprived of their traditional Western allies, the Ottomans moved closer to Germany. The background for a catastrophic confrontation among European great powers was ready.

World War I was the most decisive event in shaping the current political map of the Middle East, the political and cultural heart of the Muslim world. It ended the era of political unity under Muslim imperial systems and started an era of fragmentation. The Ottoman Empire was carved into pieces at the hands of British and French cartographers. The Arab world was divided into more than 20 units with no regard to historical, ethnic, sectarian, or geographic bases. Each of these units were then placed under colonial regimes, mandate administrations, or authoritarian monarchies. This arbitrary division of land created new minorities and planted the seeds of much of today's ethnic and sectarian conflicts

in the region. With few exceptions, states were created through imperial design at the center of which lies secret maneuvering of two colonial powers, Britain and France. As stated by Ali Mazrui, "In the first half of the century, the West had colonized more than two thirds of the Muslim world- from Kano to Karachi, from Cairo to Kuala Lumpur, from Dakar to Jakarta. The first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century also witnessed the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the more complete de-Islamization of the European state system. The aftermath included the abolition of the Caliphate as the symbolic center of Islamic authority. The *ummah* became more fragmented than ever and became even more receptive to Western cultural penetration."<sup>44</sup>

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The traumatic memory of these brutal wars and conflicts lingers in the minds of millions of young North Africans especially in the face of rejection by France, alongside with other former European colonialists, to deal with burden of its history.

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Under the secret Sykes- Picot Agreement of 1916, Britain and France divided the Middle East into their distinct zones of direct control and influence, contradicting the promises which Britain made to Sharif Hussein under the Hussein-

MacMohan Correspondence (1915-16) as a reward for the Arab Revolt against the Ottoman Empire. Following the conclusion of the war, this arrangement was endorsed by the League of Nations in 1919 under Article 22 of its Covenant declaring Syria as the French and Iraq and Palestine as the British mandates. In August 1920, the Ottoman Empire was forced to sign the Treaty of Sèvres, as the final nail on the coffin of the empire. According to the treaty, Anatolia would be divided and occupied by Greece, Britain, France, and Italy, an independent Armenia and Kurdistan would be established, while the British and the French mandates in Syria, Iraq and Palestine would be recognized. Turks were given only a tiny and landlocked piece of land in the center of Anatolia. Nationalist Ottoman military officers rejected the Sèvres Treaty and liberated much of Anatolia by successfully organizing a popular struggle of national independence, leading to the establishment of modern Turkey. However, Syria, Iraq and Palestine remained under the control of Britain and France. In Palestine, the British plan was to establish a Jewish homeland as promised under the Balfour Declaration (1917). A massive influx of Jewish populations and forced exodus of Palestinians gradually changed population dynamics, followed by the eventual establishment of Israel in 1948 at the United Nations. Between 1947 and 1949, 760,000 Palestinians were forced to flee their country due to

the fear created among the civilians as a result of numerous massacres committed by violent Jewish organizations.<sup>45</sup> The United Nations thus wrapped up the task of drawing the political map of the Middle East through direct occupations and interventions.

By the onset of the First World War, colonization of the rest of the Muslim world was nearly complete, leading to indigenous Muslim resistance movements in those places. Direct European colonial presence continued until the end of the Second World War which led to the decline of European colonial powers, and in the new post-war world system, new independent Muslim states came into existence. However, the boundaries of these new states reflected colonial experiences. In the Malay world, Dutch-colonized Indonesia became independent in 1949 and Malaysia was established in 1963 out of the British-colonized Malaya. In some other locations, the experience of colonization by a single European power did not guarantee political unity. In the French-colonized North Africa, Tunisia and Morocco (1956), and Algeria became separate independent states. In the case of Algeria, independence was achieved in 1962, after a decade-long war of independence in which nearly one million Algerians were killed and 1.8 million Algerians were uprooted from their homes.<sup>46</sup> Libya experienced a similar anti-colonial struggle. The traumatic memory of these brutal wars and

conflicts lingers in the minds of millions of young North Africans especially in the face of rejection by France, alongside with other former European colonialists, to deal with burden of its history. In the British colonial India, fragmentation of Muslim populations into three large pieces created a long-lasting legacy, paving the way for modern ethnic and religious conflicts in the region. In addition to tensions between India and Pakistan that saw many wars before it escalated into a nuclear arms race, the on-going conflict of Kashmir is a legacy of colonialism.<sup>47</sup> As they are the winning founders of the current international system, the attitude of former European colonial powers about this part of their history is at best a complete denial if not an arrogant claim that colonialism brought benefits to the colonized.

Even though the period of colonialism has officially ended, the era of post-colonial interventions has started. This meant numerous military interventions with the direct support of the outside powers, most notably the United States. However, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan became the most burning issue felt throughout the Muslim world throughout the 1980s. The outcome of this occupation was the death of nearly 1.5 million Afghan civilians and millions of others had to flee from their country and became refugees in neighboring countries. The impact of the Afghan resistance against the Soviet occupation

has continued to be felt long after the collapse of the Soviet Union, leading to an even more bloody tribal and ethnic civil war. Afghanistan became the rallying point and training camp for numerous militant Arab Islamist organizations who initially enjoyed the encouragement as well as financial and military support of the United States and wealthy Arab states. After the withdrawal of the Soviets in 1989, the previously US-allied radical groups, most significantly al-Qaeda launched a wave of anti-American terror attacks, the most dramatic among which was September 11. This opened yet another chapter of imperial intervention in the fate of this poor, landlocked yet extremely strategic nation.

The end of the Cold War paved the way for resurfacing of old identity issues in international politics. The fate of Muslim minorities, particularly in the territory of the former Soviet Union and Eastern bloc became a new issue. Between 1992 and 1995, the Bosnian War created a massive humanitarian disaster, causing thousands of civilian casualties all under the watch of major powers. In the words of Robert Fisk, "Ethnic cleansing of Muslims in Bosnia went on for years before we intervened. Ethnic cleansing of Christians and Yazidis in Iraq- and the murder of American hostages in Syria- brought an almost immediate response."<sup>48</sup>

The Soviet Union disintegrated into newly independent nations but when



Azerbaijan declared its independence it provoked a sharp response from Moscow. The Azerbaijan and Armenian conflict resulted in the occupation of Nagorno Karabagh by Armenia and this occupation continues to be ignored by the international system. In the post-Cold War system, with the notable exception of Kosovo, Muslim minority communal conflicts fail to draw a worldwide attention and remain unresolved. Spots of conflicts such as Kashmir in India, Chechnya in Russia, Patani in Thailand, Xinxiang in China, Mindanao in the Philippines, and Arakan Muslims in Myanmar, have their distinct historical and sociological roots. Yet they continue to be utilized as efficient mobilization sources for global militant movements in the absence of any efficient international response to them.

### *Denial of Democracy and Political Participation*

Muslim minorities are not the only suppressed communities. In the absence of democracy, Muslims do not enjoy their full degree of political and economic freedoms in most majority-Muslim states themselves. While the rest of the world is experiencing a wave of democratization, the Muslim world presents itself as a curious exception. As Larry Diamond points out, “[as] every one of the world’s major cultural realms had become host to a significant

democratic presence... the continuing absence of a single democratic regime in the Arab world is a striking anomaly.”<sup>49</sup> The question why the Muslim world has stayed outside of the global movement towards democratization despite the end of the Cold War can be answered either by reference to culture and value system of Islam or material variables such as the effects of oil.<sup>50</sup> Others have maintained that the lack of democracy is an Arab rather than a Muslim gap.<sup>51</sup> Yet like economy-based arguments, domestic institutional explanations needs to highlight one crucial factor more clearly: the role of outside interventions that help sustain authoritarian political structures at the expense of democratization.

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The end of the Cold War brought optimism as a new wave of democratization demolished authoritarian systems in East and Central Europe, yet it became clear soon that the Muslim world could not be included in this wave.

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Postponement of democratization in the Muslim world was seen as a strategic necessity in the context of the Cold War and still continues to be seen this way. The United States often sponsored and supported military takeovers in the Third World, including numerous occasions

in its Muslim allies. The most dramatic example of Western anti-democratic interventions was the military coup against the democratically-elected Iranian Prime Minister Mossadegh in 1953.<sup>52</sup> The Iranian coup set an example to be repeated in other cases from Indonesia to Pakistan and Turkey. The effects of these takeovers have been disastrous for the consolidation of democratic systems and critical institutions including political parties. The end of the Cold War brought optimism as a new wave of democratization demolished authoritarian systems in East and Central Europe, yet it became clear soon that the Muslim world could not be included in this wave. In February 1992, following the victory in Algeria of the Front Islamique du Salut (FIS) in the first round of the general elections, the military staged a coup cancelling the second round of the elections and forcing the country's president to resign. The reaction of the international powers, particularly Europeans, was muted. French politicians from the right to the left were alarmed at the prospects of an Islamist victory, which they feared would create not only a wave of migration to France, but also trigger revolts in other countries of North Africa. Likewise, the United States remained silent.<sup>53</sup>

In Turkey, the electoral success of the Welfare Party prompted the intervention of the military into politics, and the democratically elected government was forced to resign under pressure by the

military in 1997. The Welfare Party was closed down and its leaders, including Necmettin Erbakan, were banned from politics. The process of militarization that came to be known as the February 28 process resulted in a massive suppression of the cultural and political rights of conservative members of Turkish society. Nine years later, the outcome of the 2006 elections in the Palestinian territories, which ended with the victory of Hamas, was not accepted, leading to a coup against Hamas that paved the way for the currently fragmented structure of Palestine. The Algerian and Palestinian elections demonstrated that the Western rhetoric of democracy promotion could be quickly reversed by the discourse of Islamist threat.<sup>54</sup>

In 2011, the Arab Spring ushered in an era of new hope for democracy and political transformation in North Africa and the Middle East. Dictators who were in place for decades, largely thanks to the external support they enjoyed, crumbled one after the other in the face of popular uprisings. In Tunisia, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali was overthrown in January 2011 following violent street demonstrations that started in December 2010 after the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi in Sidi Bouzid. This incident led to a wave of popular demonstrations in numerous Arab countries. Protests erupted in January 2011 in Egypt and after just 18 days, Hosni Mubarak, who had held power since 1981, offered his resignation under

pressure from the military. Four days after a massive popular uprising shook the four-decade long rule of Muammar al-Qaddafi in Libya and as a result of an international intervention, al-Qaddafi was overthrown in August 2011. Meanwhile, protests forced Yemen's long-reigning Ali Abdullah Salih to resign and flee the country in January 2012.

The success of all these revolts motivated Syria's long-suppressed opposition to seize the opportunity and start a revolt against Bashar al-Assad in January 2011. The protests provoked an extremely violent response from the regime, starting a still-continuing massive civil war in the country. As a result of the conflict, nearly 350,000 Syrians have been killed and an estimated 9 million others have fled their homes since March 2011. More than three million Syrians have sought refuge in Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, and Iraq. Despite US President Barack Obama's personal definition of the use of chemical bombs as the final point for an international intervention in Syria, and despite the fact that sarin gas bombs were dropped on civilians in the Ghouta suburbs of Damascus in August 2013 by Assad regime's forces, the international community continues to stand idle in front of this massive humanitarian disaster. Yet when ISIS started its terror acts, brutally executing its American and European hostages, the White House acted promptly and started an aerial bombing campaign. Many critics of the US-led

bombing point out the fact that unless the root causes of this conflict are eliminated, it will be impossible to neutralize this threat by aerial attacks. Otherwise Syria will be perceived by larger Muslim masses as the 14<sup>th</sup> Muslim country that the United States has bombed since 1980.<sup>55</sup> Despite this fact, US Secretary of State John Kerry stated that the United States would have to negotiate with Assad, a move that Turkish Prime Minister Davutoğlu promptly described as similar to "shaking hands with Hitler."<sup>56</sup>

As the Syrian conflict was evolving into a civil war of catastrophic proportions, the Arab Spring suffered its other major setback in Egypt with the military coup against the country's first democratically elected President Muhammed Mursi in July 2013. Once again, major international powers displayed their known pragmatic reaction of siding with authoritarianism rather than with democracy. Democratic Western governments, most notably Germany, have not lost much time to embrace the new military regime in Egypt, rolling out the red carpet for the new Egyptian dictator. The Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 requires the United States to restrict aid to a country "whose duly elected head of government is deposed by military coup or decree." Thus in order to avoid cutting aid to Egypt, Washington has refused to accept that Sisi's take-over amounted to a military coup. Secretary of State John Kerry went so far as to call the military intervention a move towards

“restoring democracy.”<sup>57</sup> The United States and democratic European powers who tirelessly preach democracy elsewhere when it is in their interests obviously did not have any problem with the fact that the military regime’s courts have sentenced democratically elected Muhammad Mursi and nearly a thousand leaders and members of the Muslim Brotherhood to death penalty and that Egyptian security forces brutally suppressed anti-coup demonstrations, killing over one thousand civilians. The regime started to carry out these executions in March 2015.<sup>58</sup> This double-sided behavior of the West has received sharp criticism from many intellectuals and the media. As a *New York Times* editorial states, “the Obama administration has refused to even call the coup a coup and moved too gingerly to protest the military’s excesses. It has to be more honest about the unsavory choices it is making, including whether any support for a repressive army will ever bring stability and democracy.”<sup>59</sup> Another editorial makes the following observation: “Just when the United States is battling Sunni extremists in Iraq and Syria, seeking to isolate the terrorist group known as the Islamic State, Egypt’s crushing authoritarianism could well persuade a significant number of its citizens that violence is the only tool they have for fighting back.”<sup>60</sup>

Still there are those other Western intellectuals who support exclusion of Islam from the democratic landscape.

David Brooks illustrates the deeply-rooted essentialist suspicions in the West about democracy in Muslim countries especially when elections allegedly guarantee the success of Islamists:

Promoting elections is generally a good thing even when they produce victories for democratic forces we disagree with. But elections are not a good thing when they lead to the elevation of people whose substantive beliefs fall outside the democratic orbit... This week’s military coup may merely bring Egypt back to where it was: a bloated and dysfunctional superstate controlled by a self-serving military elite. But at least radical Islam, the main threat to global peace, has been partially discredited and removed from office.<sup>61</sup>

## Conclusion

Among Huntington’s civilizational categories, the Muslim world has some unique characteristics. It is the largest and politically the most severely fragmented civilizational category. It is an island of authoritarianism with few successful electoral democracies. Finally, despite its demographic size constituting roughly a quarter of the world’s population, it lacks representation in global political and economic decision-making institutions. Political fragmentation, crisis of democracy, and exclusion from the international system are all inter-related factors that perpetuate a sense of civilizational injustice among Muslim masses.

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There is a widespread perception among Muslims that their legitimate grievances are ignored not only by domestic authoritarian regimes but also by the international system. Continuous suppression of political rights, unresolved Muslim minority problems, continued foreign military presence in Muslim lands, and the question of Palestine are among the central Muslim grievances. The slow response of the international community to the war in Bosnia and now in Syria is bitterly noted in the Muslim psyche. Huntington seeks answers to the question of violence in the Muslim world in the text of Islam, largely ignoring the political context. Many Muslims and non-Muslims fall into the same trap in trying to cure the problem by offering a softer version of Islam. Materialist and statist tradition in the scholarship of International Relations focuses on order, stability and peace as the absence of war. Yet the question is political, and political crises can be solved with political responses.

The Muslim world will be unable to solve this representation crisis unless a process of economic and political integration is achieved through full democratization. The Arab Spring has offered a glimpse of hope in this direction but once again it was suppressed through the collaboration of authoritarian regimes and international powers acting with the same instincts they developed during the Cold War. The endorsement by these powers of the Egyptian military coup that toppled the country's first and only democratically elected president, illustrates the continuation of this mentality which prioritizes relations with authoritarian regimes at the expense of popular will. Yet suppression of democratization does not terminate the political aspirations of increasing numbers of educated, urban and rapidly globalizing young Muslims who are now armed with the tools of information technology. As Huntington predicted as early as 1960s, unless political aspirations of the upwardly mobilizing modern young elites are channeled into political participation through an inclusive democratic system, instability and political violence will be the only expected outcome.

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The Muslim world will be unable to solve this representation crisis unless a process of economic and political integration is achieved through full democratization.

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