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Huntington or Halliburton? The Real Clash of Civilizations in American Life

Abstract: A wide variety of sources, including the Huntington literature and popular mass media, show that Huntington's "clash of civilizations" idea actually has very little value in understanding the current global political context. The central assumption of Huntington's view, that cultural kinship ties influence loyalties and agreements on a global scale, has little to do with the daily lives of American citizens and little to do with the decisions made by the current presidential administration. The mass media evidence from the United States shows that the the most important "kinship" ties are not religious or cultural, but economic. The argument involves a deeper analysis of the current trend towards religious programs on American television, a timeline of events relating to the Halliburton – Cheney relationship, and views expressed by members of the United States military in *Stars and Stripes*.

My view of Samuel P. Huntington's "Clash of Civilizations" thesis is influenced by two major facets of my own life. First, although I was raised a Roman Catholic, I took a number of Religious Studies courses as an undergraduate student, including Introduction to Islam and History of Islam. Second, as a professor in a Department of Philosophy at a regional state university in Georgia, I took part in a workshop at Emory University entitled "Teaching the Middle East" in the fall of 2003. This workshop was sponsored by the Georgia Consortium for International Studies, the Georgia Middle East Studies Consortium, and the Global Program of the University System of Georgia. I remain gratefully indebted to the workshop's organizers and participants, and I thank them for their influence on this article.

The members of this workshop addressed Huntington's work by reading his primary texts and a number of commentary articles, including Roy P. Mottadeh's *The Clash of Civilizations: An Islamicist's Cri-*

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tique (1995), Edward Said's *The Clash of Ignorance* (2001), and the article *A Fading Hell* from *The Economist* (1999). I looked forward to discussing these articles with the other workshop participants, and the wide range of reactions to Huntington was fascinating. A number of participants were skeptical of the clash of civilizations thesis, finding it too simplistic or stereotyping. But many of the participants agreed with the thesis, and when challenged, some participants brought up 9/11 as a "proof" that Huntington "must have been right." The current resurgence of American nationalism was referenced repeatedly. Other participants mentioned the current resurgence of religious television programs in the United States, evidenced by an article that appeared in *TV Guide* last fall (*TV Goes With God*, October 17-19, 2003; 40-46).

A wide variety of sources, including the Huntington literature and popular mass media, show that Huntington's "clash of civilizations" idea actually has very little value in understanding the current global political context. The central assumption of Huntington's view, that cultural kinship ties influence loyalties and agreements on a global scale, has little to do with the daily lives of American citizens and little to do with the decisions made by the current presidential administration. The mass media evidence from the United States shows that the the most important "kinship" ties are not religious or cultural, but economic. The argument involves a deeper analysis of the current trend towards religious programs on American television, a timeline of events relating to the Halliburton – Cheney relationship,

and views expressed by members of the United States military in *Stars and Stripes*.

In 1993, Huntington wrote that conflict between civilizations would be the latest phase in the evolution of conflict in the modern world; that differences among civilizations are real and basic; that "different civilizations have different views on the relations between God and man," and that civilizations are differentiated from each other most importantly by religion. (Huntington 1993, 23-24) He cites Gilles Kepel's idea of "the revival of religion", claiming it provides a basis for identity and commitment that transcends national boundaries and unites civilizations. These civilization kinship ties lead to ardent loyalties, according to Huntington; even to double-standards:

"Muslims contrasted Western actions against Iraq with the West's failure to protect Bosnians against Serbs and to impose sanctions on Israel for violating UN resolutions. The West, they alleged, was using a double standard. A world of clashing civilizations, however, is inevitably a world of double standards: people apply one standard to their kin-countries and a different standard to others". (Huntington 1993, 42)

Huntington's description and implicit justification of this double standard is one of the most disquieting claims I have read in academic literature, especially when applied in the context of basic human rights. It reminds me of a particular church policy decision I

heard about secondhand: in a nearby Christian church, a female member of the congregation was raped by a male member, and a number of other members of the church knew about the rape. Rather than report the rape to the local law enforcement authorities, the members of the church decided that the man should engage in a systematic process of “reconciliation and redemption” with the woman, instead of going through a trial and “ruining his life.” Had the man not been a member of the church, such a suggestion would never have been considered. I wondered whether or not the church would have proceeded in the same way had the woman been a child, or a person unable to give consent. At minimum, it should be acknowledged that double-standards based on religious or cultural ties are unfair and immoral; they are not a basis for good religious practice or political decision making.

Nevertheless, Huntington holds that these civilization ties will continue to gain importance in the global political context, and that the West is in the lead.

“The west is now at an extraordinary peak of power in relation to other civilizations. Its superpower opponent has disappeared from the map. Military conflict among Western states is unthinkable”. (Huntington 1993, 45)

Perhaps this describes the perception of most Americans in 1993, but the last four years and the dramatic change in the United States relationship with the United Nations have dramatically changed that perception.

The literature that emerged in response to Huntington’s clash of civilizations was immense. In *The Clash of Civilizations: An Islamicist’s Critique*, Roy P. Mottadeh argues that Huntington underestimates the variety of perspectives within cultures, and their changeability. (Mottadeh 1995, 9) He also provides a number of examples in which Western and Islamic/Muslim cultures actually have much in common, or ideas claimed as Western were actually borrowings from Muslim culture. The prevalence of free-market economies, women’s right to vote and own property, and democracy cannot be claimed as simply Western inventions; in some cases these notions were kept alive by Muslim culture, in some cases imposed by imperialism and colonialism, but in any case, they remain common ground between the two allegedly disparate civilizations. (Mottadeh 1995, 8-12) One of the most important points Mottadeh makes is found in his explanation of the distinction between Islamicists, Islamists, and militant extremists. Mottadeh identifies himself as an Islamicist scholar, while many of the concerns of Huntington only apply to a small group of Muslims properly called “Islamists.” Islamists call for a reimposition of Islamic law to varying degrees. But militant extremist Muslims are a small, vocal minority that Mottadeh says should not be allowed to set anyone’s agenda for anything...this group will remain a distinct minority, because its followers have large areas of internal disagreement, and because it has no real answers to the problems of economic and

social justice that beleaguer the majority of Muslims. (Mottadeh 1995, 14)

Huntington's central assumptions about the Muslim world only apply to this small but vocal minority. This is a group that actually stands at odds with the majority of Muslims, and the real history of the Islamic world, its free markets and its overwhelmingly democratic ideals. (This point regarding free markets and democratic values will also take on a new twist in the final sections of this paper regarding Halliburton and its contracts in Iraq, arrived at by non-free-market closed bidding.)

I'll See Your Baptist and Raise You a Catholic: The Poker Face of Religion on Television

Does Huntington still have a point regarding the popularization of religion in the West? At first glance, the article by Mark Nollinger might give this impression: a number of new television shows in the United States since 9/11 feature characters who either communicate directly with a deity or are defined by their relationships with a God-like creator figure. Interestingly, all of these main characters are young females. But on closer inspection, the article actually shows a broader cultural shift toward a generalized spirituality, rather than a specifically Western or non-Muslim religion. As Nollinger notes,

“What sets the new breed of spirituality themed programs apart is a more daring, thoughtful

and sophisticated approach to issues of God, faith and the afterlife. Ambiguity is in. Sentimentality and wish fulfillment are out... you also won't find much gospel in any of these shows, most of which are deliberately nonspecific about the spiritual forces animating their characters' universe (and thus relatively inoffensive to those who might be inclined to outrage and boycotts – an advertiser's definition of hell”. (Nollinger 2003, 44)

Nollinger's point bears fruit in comments from show creators on how they shaped their deity characters, including “the more orthodox God depicted in *Joan of Arcadia*” who “is pretty open-minded, telling Joan that it's not about religion. It's about fulfilling your true nature.” (Nollinger 2003, 44). A number of scholars interviewed for the article echo this sentiment, including a professor of Religious Studies, two Catholic clergymen, and a Baptist.

The Roots of Muslim Rage, or the Roots of Retirement Accounts?

Another issue raised by Mottadeh deserves analysis. On page 17 of the 1995 article Mottadeh discusses Huntington's use of certain concepts in philosophy of science, specifically Thomas Kuhn's notion of a paradigm shift. Essentially, Huntington holds that the Western and Muslim worlds are following two warring paradigms, and that the Western paradigm has intellec-

tually and scientifically advanced over the Muslim paradigm. In these passages, Huntington joins a number of scholars and non-scholars who misuse Kuhn. But even more importantly, Mottadeh shows that it would be fallacious to assume that normative theories and legal systems, paradigmatic or not, can actually influence social and governmental behavior. (Mottadeh 1995, 19) A few years later, Huntington revises his paradigm shift analogy by adding on a layer of complexity, producing a theoretical structure that is worthy of Kepler's epicycles:

"Mr. Huntington went even further in an article in this spring's edition of Foreign Affairs. He now argues that the world is moving towards a multipolar system made up of regions defined only rather vaguely in cultural terms; that each of these regions will contain a major power but also one or more secondary powers, with which outsiders can co-operate in order to limit the bigger regional power's freedom of action; but that co-operation across regional boundaries will be easier in some cases than others, depending on how wide the culture gap between the regions is (which implies that some civilisations are less unlike each other than the rest). In the coming century, big powers will "compete, clash and coalesce with each other in various permutations and combinations." (The Economist, 1999, 10)

I was especially interested in Huntington's discussion of Kuhn, because my own academic work has primarily involved philosophy of science. Perhaps there

are other insights that a philosopher of science can provide that will be more useful than the "clashes of civilizations" or "warring paradigms" models. In my attempts to understand how scientists work, and how their social practices are shaped, I look at many factors, including physical technologies and theories of "objective" perspectives. But in understanding scientists' research practices, I also follow the trail of funding and grant sources. The economic paper trail can enlighten us to motives for actions in a number of different ways, and I would argue that in the case of current relationships between the United States, the "West" as a whole, and the Muslim world, there is a great deal of information regarding *economic kinship relations*, rather than civilization kinship relations. This leads me to argue that kin means little in comparison to economically beneficial relationships in today's global political context.

First, a timeline of Halliburton's relationship with the United States government and military is helpful:

Halliburton Timeline:

1919; Halliburton was founded. The corporation has two major branches, an Energy Services Group and an Engineering and Construction segment; as well as relationships with numerous subsidiaries.

1942; Halliburton subsidiary Kellogg, Brown and Root's predecessor, Brown Shipbuilding Company, builds the first of 359 for the US

Navy at the Greens Bayou Fabrication Yard in Houston, Texas. Since this time, KBR has become the premier provider of logistics and support services for all branches of the military.

1965; KBR constructed Phan Rang Air Base in Vietnam.

1991; After the Persian Gulf War, Halliburton crews brought 320 oil wells under control in Kuwait in less time than expected (12 months as opposed to 18 months).

2000; In December, the California Energy Crisis is in full force in southern California. The price of electricity jumped more than 1000% in less than one month. The price of natural gas went from \$1 a therm to \$10 a therm.

2001, May 18; Greg Palast reports in the Guardian that there need not have been an “Energy Crisis.” The energy companies manipulated prices via power grids, monopoly rents, economic withholding, and physical withholding of energy resources to create artificial shortages and brown-outs. The companies involved were Williams and AES. Thomas Cruikshank, a member of the Williams board, was also the retired CEO of Halliburton who picked Dick Cheney to be his successor. Richard Darman, a member of the AES board, also worked with Dick Cheney in the first Bush ad-

ministration. Cruikshank was later proven (via Williams company documents) to have colluded with AES to keep power plants in southern California offline in 2000.

2001, Summer; Williams corporation decides to cooperate with investigators, but only after Dick Cheney meets with leaders of the energy industry to determine the official White House response to the “energy crisis.” Also at that meeting: Ken Lay, Enron Chairman, and David Lesar, Cheney’s own successor at Halliburton.

2003, March 22; Weeks before the first bombs dropped in Iraq, the Bush administration began rebuilding plans. ABCNEWS has obtained a copy of a 99-page contract worth \$600 million. “We have never in our 40-year history spent this much money in one country in one year,” said Andrew S. Natsios, administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development, an independent federal agency that receives overall foreign policy guidance from the State Department. The USAID contract is filled with details about plans to construct Iraqi schools, airports, roads, bridges, hospitals, power plants and more. But other details are being shielded by the USAID, which chose to conduct the bidding in secret.

2003, March 24; KBR is awarded a 7 billion dollar contract for extinguishing oil well fires in Iraq. “KBR was selected for this award based on the fact that KBR is the only contractor that could commence implementing the complex contingency plan on extremely short notice.” Firefighting duties were also subcontracted to Boots and Coots International Well Control, Inc. and Wild Well Control, Inc. There was no public bidding process before the contract was awarded. Halliburton and its subsidiaries also appear to be the only companies holding the necessary security clearances for this work.

2003, April 11; \$50.3 million has been spent on the contract. Representatives Henry Waxman of California and John Dingell of Michigan, both Democrats, call for an investigation into the way that the Bush administration is awarding contracts. It is also noteworthy that the contracts provide a massive amount of revenue for Boots and Coots, which was facing bankruptcy before the contracts were awarded, and it has been alleged that Boots and Coots deliberately inflated its pricing when the contracts were written.

2003, December 14; President George W. Bush, trying to calm a political storm, said that Vice President Dick Cheney’s former company should repay the government if it overcharged

for gasoline delivered in Iraq under a controversial prewar contract.

2004, March 14; Pentagon auditors found a Halliburton Co. subsidiary gave faulty cost estimates on a \$2.7 billion contract to serve American troops in Iraq and Kuwait, and company officials acknowledged making mistakes, Defense Department documents show.

2004, June 16; Senate Republicans defeated Democratic attempts to limit the role of private contractors in Iraq in a pair of votes that broke largely along partisan lines.

2004, June 30; Auditors looking into hefty charges rung up by Halliburton Co. and others at a beachfront hotel in Kuwait chastised the Coalition Provisional Authority for failing to better control costs. The authority’s inspector general, examining \$11 million in charges being incurred annually at the five-star Kuwait Hilton, said the Provisional Authority “did not apply adequate oversight to ensure that operating costs were minimized.”

There is a lot of material to sift through when one looks closely at the long-standing relationship between Halliburton and the military/industrial/government complex in the United States. What I find most interesting is the series of decisions made that stand in direct contrast to Huntington’s clash of civilizations thesis.

For a closer look at one example, ABC News reported extensively on the closed bidding procedures that preferentially gave Halliburton lucrative contracts – a double-standard, if you will, based not on civilizations or cultures, but on a longstanding economic relationship:

“The USAID contract is filled with details about plans to construct Iraqi schools, airports, roads, bridges, hospitals, power plants and more. But other details are being shielded by the USAID, which chose to conduct the bidding in secret. “It’s the scope and breadth that, I think, has made people take a second look at this in terms of the secrecy and the limitations of competition,” said Steven Schooner, a law professor at George Washington University. Normally, USAID puts out contracts on the Internet, and any company can bid. But to move this through quickly, the agency said it went to firms with track records and security clearances. It asked seven — about half the number that normally would have sought the business — to bid. Among the companies believed to be bidding are Bechtel, Fluor, Parsons, the Washington Group and Halliburton, Vice President Dick Cheney’s old firm. All are experienced. But in addition, all are generous political donors — principally to Republicans. The secret bidding is legal, but controversial. “If you don’t have an open process, the odds are you may not get the best price, you may not get

the best contractor, you may not have the best quality control, which may impact your mission success,” Schooner said. British troops are serving alongside U.S. troops in Iraq. But the closed process blocked British companies, as well as any foreign firm, from bidding. “We have a very keen diplomatic interest in ensuring that others not only are involved, not only will be involved, but feel as though they are part of this post-conflict exercise,” said Eric Schwartz of the Council on Foreign Relations, a Washington think tank. Also left out were international development groups, which historically have been essential to nation rebuilding because they emphasize the involvement of local people. “They must have ownership over this full development process,” said Mary McClymont, chief executive officer of InterAction, an alliance of dozens of U.S.-based nongovernmental relief organizations. “Otherwise, it’s a recipe for failure.” USAID denies politics are involved in any of this. “No political pressure was put by anybody outside the agency on us,” Natsios said. “No phone calls have been made to me by anybody.” The agency says within a year, Iraqis will have better lives because of the rebuilding. But the secret bidding process makes it impossible to know how much better, or possibly worse, things might have turned out”. *ABC News, March 22, 2003*

There are two main arguments that I have heard in defense of these bidding practices: First, some argue that these practices either do not affect the average citizens of the United States, and so we should not care if the open bidding practices were used or not. Second, some argue that because these bidding practices benefit American corporations, and indirectly some Americans who work for those corporations, we should not care if the open bidding practices were used or not.

There are a number of reasons why these arguments do not convince me. On the individual level, contractors employed under these contracts are being kidnapped and/or killed in Iraq. These individuals are asked to take massive risks in exchange for large sums of money (economic kinship ties again). But on the order of groups, there are a whole other set of reasons why these arguments are unsound. These practices do affect groups, including the groups who are native to the regions where the contracts are carried out, and including the members of the military who live and work in the products Halliburton has created – the members of the military. One example of how the military is adversely affected by business practices comes from a letter to the editor in *Stars and Stripes*, the major magazine of the United States armed forces. Michele Winter illustrates how privatized contracts and unaccompanied tours use military budgets to give economic benefit to private companies. Apparently, once again, the real kinship ties here are not Western, American, or American citizens to servicepersons. The real kinship ties are the

economic relationships between the government and corporations:

Stars and Stripes

Letters from Pacific Edition, 10/22/02-10/26/02

Tours plan par for the course

”Our civilian leadership in both the executive branch and the Department of the Army appears to be completely out of touch with servicemembers, especially those deployed downrange. It’s beyond belief that a “family values” administration would propose such a highly charged issue as unaccompanied tours at a time of sacrifice from exhaustive deployments.

The motive evidently has nothing to do with GIs’ welfare and morale. So what’s the motive? With unit rotation, who wins? The Sept. 13 issue of Stars and Stripes’s European edition included a photo of Brown & Root employees constructing a temporary camp for Marines in the Balkans. Kellogg, Brown & Root is a subsidiary of Vice President Dick Cheney’s former parent company, Halliburton. It has been contracted to provide support services — construction, maintenance, food, laundry, airfield services, supply operations, power generation and property accountability — for the Balkans and also for a “Force Provider” camp in Afghanistan, three Air Force Harvest Eagle camps

in Uzbekistan, and prisons in Guantanamo Bay. Other proposed work sites are in Kyrgyzstan and Pakistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. According to The New York Times, a lucrative 10-year contract to provide worldwide support for military operations recently won from the Army by KBR “has no lid on costs, the only logistical arrangement by the Army without an estimated cost” and is “shrouded in secrecy.” In fact, Halliburton has earned millions in federal contracts over the past 10 years by supplying military support services in Somalia, Rwanda, Haiti, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Italy and Bosnia. Earnings from current missions in the Balkans (\$2.2 billion, according to the General Accounting Office), Afghanistan, Uzbekistan and Cuba would be peanuts compared with what KBR would reap from unaccompanied Army tours in Europe and South Korea, as private contracts would replace the Base Support Battalions now doing the job. KBR is already running Army support operations in the United States. Army bases in Europe and South Korea are the obvious next step.

Unaccompanied tours is not about saving money. According to The Times, “by hiring an outside company to handle much of its logistics, the Pentagon may wind up spending more taxpayer money than if it did the work itself.” Rather, it’s a scathing plan for diverting part of

the military budget to private corporate accounts. Privatization is where President Bush continues to head with our Social Security retirement despite the toll taken on self-directed Thrift Savings Plans/401(k) retirement accounts in the past 15 months due to corporate scandals, threats of war, and investors’ votes of “no confidence.” We saw how privatization worked for Enron shareholders as well as Florida state pensioners, the second biggest losers to Enron, whose trustee was Gov. Jeb Bush. His State Board of Administration continued to buy shares of Ken Lay’s Enron as the price bottomed out, resulting in a \$300 million loss for retirees. Meanwhile, Enron CEO Lay was the single largest corporate contributor to the Republican Party. It can hardly be called coincidence that Halliburton was awarded the job to study and implement privatization of routine Army support functions under then-Secretary of Defense Cheney, who, according to the public watchdog group CorpWatch, truly personifies the “revolving door” between big business and government. When Cheney left the Pentagon to become CEO of Halliburton, bringing with him lucrative federal contracts, Halliburton started to move from construction to base support. Cheney “retired” from Halliburton with a reported \$34 million bonus for his five years of service, in addition to his \$1.3 million annual salary and millions in stock

options, after the 2000 election — not bad for a guy with five military deferments (four student, one paternity).

Cheney said he “had other priorities than military service.” Yes, such as using his government position to funnel federal contracts to himself and future campaign contributors — what the rest of us in government positions have been counseled not to do because of conflict-of-interest laws. Under the Bush administration, conflict of interest went the way of deregulation, conveniently packaged to get the government off its back and its budget deficits onto taxpayers’ backs. With a near evenly split Congress, Senate probes for war profiteering will remain a World War II relic. Secretary of the Army Thomas White is no stranger to privatization or questions of ethics. The watchdog group Public Citizen (www.citizen.org) has suggested that the Army secretary engaged in conflicts of interest pursuing changes in Army energy policy that could have benefited his former employer, Enron. “Though Secretary White recused himself from dealing with Army contracts involving his former employer, he continued to play a role in advocating the privatization of energy services at Army installations,” it said. White, “a major-league Martha Stewart,” has been asked by many major newspapers to resign. Yet he remains on the public dole, able to transcend the military rules of

“perception of wrongdoing” which seem to apply to everyone but himself. Certainly government officials have resigned for lesser reasons. Pentagon adviser Richard Perle suggested that German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder resign upon winning re-election. So why is White still Army secretary? Because he’s the money pipeline between the military budget and corporate interests. He won’t be going anywhere if Bush can help it, but Army dependents in Europe might be. Most of the members of our CEO-laden executive branch bypassed the hardships of combat, unit downrange deployments and family separation by taking the path of the privileged. The nature of their business has to do with war despite never having fought in one, and wars are what Bush is promising us, ensuring a never-ending cycle of taxpayers’ money and war booty flowing into the corporate coffers of our leaders and their contributors. Unit rotation is just a part of that package.

Michele Winter,
Würzburg, Germany” [http://www.estripes.com/
article.asp?section=&article=12419&archive=true](http://www.estripes.com/article.asp?section=&article=12419&archive=true)

Clearly, the perspective reflected in this letter to the editor illustrates a point about the economic ties between the Bush administration members and their public policy, and their global political decision making. I hope the examples I have given show why Huntington’s “clash of civilizations” idea actually has very little value

in understanding the current global political context. The central assumption of Huntington's view, that cultural kinship ties influence loyalties and agreements on a global scale, has little to do with the daily lives of American citizens and little to do with the decisions made by the current presidential administration. The mass media evidence from the United States shows that the the most important "kinship" ties are not religious or cultural, but economic. Ironically, Huntington might have said that the clash of civilizations represents not the last phase of conflict, but the latest phase of conflict *rhetoric*.

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