

The Clash of Civilizations Book Review

Synopsis of the Book

In *The Clash of Civilizations*, the author contends that the basic cause of problems and disagreements all over the globe is not really based mainly on philosophical or economic differences. Huntington believes that main cause of problems and disagreements are grounded on cultural differences. He starts in providing details regarding the origins and development of human clashes. He thinks that the simple differences in philosophies among people will eventually results to global clashes of civilizations. In this regard, the author perceives the conflict among civilizations as happening in the local and global settings. Those local clashes refer to disputes in areas of jurisdiction, while global conflicts refer to disputes in the top spot for economic supremacy and political dominance.

According to Huntington, the new world order after the end of the Cold War and collapse of the USSR in 1991 is dependent on certain civilizations like American, Chinese and Japanese civilizations. The author mentions that the world will eventually be dominated by these civilizations in the long run, and the conflicts in religious beliefs as well as border disputes would trigger the massive conflicts among these civilizations. Aside from this, Huntington believes that the growing discrepancies between the rich and the poor countries all over the world will also add fuel to the fire. He mentions that countries that are wealthy will tend to use their resources to continue to improve their defenses and protection against the threats of other countries. Once the massive conflicts of civilizations eventually happen, Huntington believes they will be so difficult to stop and he fears that they will be much more brutal than the wars that mankind has already seen.

Methodology

Huntington used his extensive understanding of political science to be able to make clear explanations regarding the various civilizations that he identified would make up the new world order and would eventually trigger the global clash. It was very evident that the author used mostly secondary research methods and extensive historical analysis to be able to explain his ideas about the roles that civilizations would eventually perform in triggering the brutal global clash.

For example, Huntington cited the previous wars that America participated and the reasons why they could not avoid them. He believed that because of the massive global influence of America, there would come a time when the country would encounter resistance especially from Islamic countries that do not agree with their advocacies (Huntington, 1998). While the author believes that America does not sincerely have any intention to participate in such a global clash, it will have no other option as these Islamic countries would continue to make actions and attacks on American borders and harm its people.

Huntington also employed a secondary research and historical analysis of the Japanese civilization to help point out his argument that this country will also be eventually involved in the process of triggering the global clash of civilizations. He pointed out that Japan and America had never really been able to restore excellent relations with one another after the World War 2. This hatred towards one another will sooner or later pave the way for both countries to engage in local scale conflicts at first, and these simple conflicts would eventually escalate into a bigger scale, pulling along with them the participation of other civilizations.

Strengths of the Arguments

Huntington's arguments certainly offer viable ways to interpret previous events that happened among various civilizations. The author's arguments may be considered aggressive and confrontational, but there are many facts and reliable information that are included in the book which is hard to ignore. This information all point to the reality that there are growing problems of chaos emerging from developing disputes among nations and civilizations whose beliefs and customs are firmly grounded on religion.

The author also does not rely on analyzing one perspective of civilization to make his arguments. Instead, he uses a global approach, and Huntington links one specific civilization to another and discusses their historical activities and past conflicts that can most likely lead towards the global clash of civilizations. From America to Europe and Asia, Huntington is able to find the common links and characteristics among these civilizations that certainly make them prone to getting in constant disputes with others.

The book also somehow is effective in providing sound recommendations to avoid the potential emergence of the global clash of civilizations. Huntington specifically cites the crucial role that America would have to undertake in preventing the global clash of civilizations from happening. The author believes that America has to control its efforts in intervening into the leadership of other countries and influencing them in their decision making process. Huntington believes that the common mistake of America is getting too much involved in the governance of other countries, and if the country is not careful, this can certainly help trigger the global clash of civilizations.

Weakness of the Arguments

The author mentions that culture is the main obstacle that prevents civilizations from achieving unity. However, Huntington is not able to completely discuss the specific events in the past that may have contributed to the formation of the new world order. He is also unable to clearly provide adequate supporting information on the supposed role of America in the assumed clash of civilizations.

Another obvious weakness is that Huntington is not able to pay attention to the strong influences of modernization that could be an effective solution to prevent the clash of civilizations. Instead, he sticks to his belief and conviction that modernization will bring nothing but make the situation worse.

Huntington's ideas are also perceived as being too much hypothetical or exaggerated. Critics believe that Huntington's analysis of civilizations are biased and based on outdated information. They think that because of the author's biased approach in discussing various civilizations, these countries are portrayed in a negative manner to the readers and eventually affect their perceptions on these countries.

Because of the sensitive nature of the topics being discussed by Huntington in the book, it could be possible that any mistakes in the discussion of civilizations could easily trigger wrongful accusations among them. There are even people that state that Huntington's arguments are subversive and only help to contribute to the establishment of chaos and disorderliness of global civilizations.

Islam has bloody borders

What Huntington meant when he said that Islam had bloody borders was that almost all countries that embraced Islam as their main religion had already been involved in massive conflicts because of the emergence of various Muslim groups that had different interpretations of Islam.

The author also mentioned that Islam was frequently involved in various fault line wars. Huntington proved this by citing the example of the constant conflicts between the Shi'a and the Sunni groups who believe in Allah but are separated by their distinct ideas on how Islam has to be practiced. As members of the Shi'a and Sunni have all been dispersed in other Arab nations, these countries also get inevitably involved in fault line wars even if they do not really want to. Because neither one of the two Muslim groups want to give in, the respective Arab countries that support them participate in bloody wars in an effort to annihilate one another in the name of Allah.

These have always been the dynamics of fault line wars where Islam has frequently been involved. Huntington sees fault line wars as a result of the pride and greed of people for domination and supremacy, even against people of the same cultural backgrounds and religious beliefs. People involved in fault line wars are prepared to kill even their own brothers for the sake of protecting their own traditions, beliefs and principles especially when it comes to religious matters. Huntington believes that what make fault line wars so bloody and destructive is the extensive participation of many countries and the loss of innocent lives because of the conflicts on ideas and principles.

Huntington's thesis on the Middle East today

Huntington's ideas certainly apply on the Middle East at present. Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine, Israel, and Afghanistan have already been involved in bloody fault line wars due to their differences in the interpretation and practice of Islam. Members of the Sunni and Shi'a groups have clearly been dispersed in these Middle Eastern countries, and as these two conflicting groups have continued to wage war up to the present time, they have also included the countries that are sheltering and supporting them (Hunter, 1998).

Aside from religious differences, the cultural differences among the various Middle Eastern countries have also caused conflicts among them. Most notorious terrorist groups all over the world have mainly originated from these Middle Eastern countries. Majority of them want Israel to be destroyed and Palestine to be declared as the new center of government in the Middle East. This is the reason why Israel is always under constant threats and pressure from the terrorist groups being supported by other Middle Eastern countries. Huntington's idea surely applies in this regard (Berger, 2003).

Huntington is correct in mentioning that the religious and cultural differences among the Middle Eastern countries have been fueled by the greed for power and pride to become the most dominant nation. Israel is in a very unfortunate situation to be the common target of the efforts of its neighboring countries to bring them down. It is difficult to imagine that instead of helping one another, Middle Eastern countries have joined arms to defeat their common enemy which is Israel (Harrison, 2001). Such is the state of disorderliness and chaos that is happening in the Middle East which fits in with the arguments of Huntington.

Because Middle Eastern countries are known for their rich oil deposits and resources, they are also frequent targets of terrorist groups, and many conflicts have already happened due to the unfair practices of these oil rich countries in terms of selling their oil in the global market. America, for one, has constantly criticized Middle Eastern countries especially those OPEC members for manipulating the oil prices and making it difficult for other countries to afford their oil (Wallace, 2009). Thus, Huntington is also correct in mentioning that the greed of countries for dominance will be a significant factor in the potential emergence of global clash of civilizations.

As the dominant oil-rich countries in the Middle East continue to keep getting wealthier and more progressive, they are also widening the gap among other Middle Eastern countries that are not as developed and rich. This has also been predicted by Huntington which can help pave the way for the occurrence of the global clash of civilizations. The widening discrepancy will create a more disintegrated Middle East in the long run, which would make them more prone to get involved in various conflicts.

Huntington mentioned that America would have a pivotal role in the unfolding of the global clash of civilizations, and again he is correct as America has successfully been tempted by terrorist groups hiding and being supported by Middle Eastern countries to join the war. With the successful terrorist attack on the Twin Towers last September 11, 2001 by Al Qaeda, America launched the War on Terror which signaled the participation of America in the conflict of civilizations (Bonney, 2008). While it is clear that America wants to avenge the massive loss of American lives that they suffered, the government has insisted that its objective in launching the War on Terror is to wipe out Al Qaeda and other terrorist groups hiding in the Middle East for the benefit of humanity.

Personal understanding

This book definitely enhanced my understanding of current world affairs and especially the situation in the Middle East today. The arguments of Huntington were some of the most comprehensive and realistic perspectives that I have heard. On my part, Huntington did a good job in stating his ideas while using his deep understanding of political science to be able provide valid arguments about the possibility of the global clash of civilizations to happen in the foreseeable future.

Prior to encountering this book by Huntington, I honestly did not really care so much about world affairs and even Middle Eastern countries. However, after reading his arguments and observing the recent events all over the world, it was certainly hard to neglect his predictions that sooner or later, a global clash of civilizations would happen inevitably. It was a rude awakening for me especially with regard to the recent events that rocked and caught America by surprise. Just three years after Huntington wrote this book, America was struck by perhaps the most destructive terrorist attack that has been done in the face of the Earth. During that time, America and the Middle East were still under heavy conflicts because of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's opposition and refusal to cooperate with the American government to stop their planned invasion of other Middle Eastern countries.

After reading and analyzing Huntington's arguments and ideas in the book, I was slowly able to connect the dots and realized that what he was saying could really happen if all civilizations all over the globe would not be able to get united sooner or later.

The current situation of the Middle East, where chaos and disorderliness are very evident, makes me really worry about the imminent global clash of civilizations that could potentially happen within the next decades. The fact that some Middle Eastern countries have been proven to be supporting Al Qaeda, the terrorist group responsible for the deadly terrorist attack on America, does not help to resolve the current conflicts. I do not see Al Qaeda and other terrorist groups to be surrendering anytime soon, especially as the Middle Eastern countries that have been repeatedly accused of protecting these terrorist groups have kept denying these claims for the longest time.

With their massive oil resources as their weapons for dominance, it is not that hard to believe that Middle Eastern countries would someday become global superpower in the same level as that of America and China. Middle Eastern countries know exactly how other countries all over the world in desperate need for oil would be begging them to lower their oil prices. Somehow, they would seize control over the world's oil production and when this happens, conflicts will surely emerge.

Perhaps the best lesson that I learned from Huntington's book was his advice to America to always stay in control and never make hasty decisions. I agree with Huntington that America, being the superpower that it is, will play a key role in preventing the global clash of civilizations from happening. I think the key is for the present government to start fixing its damaged relations with Middle Eastern countries through diplomacy and peaceful negotiations to be able to show their sincerity in fixing the problems and achieving and maintaining overall peace all over the world.

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