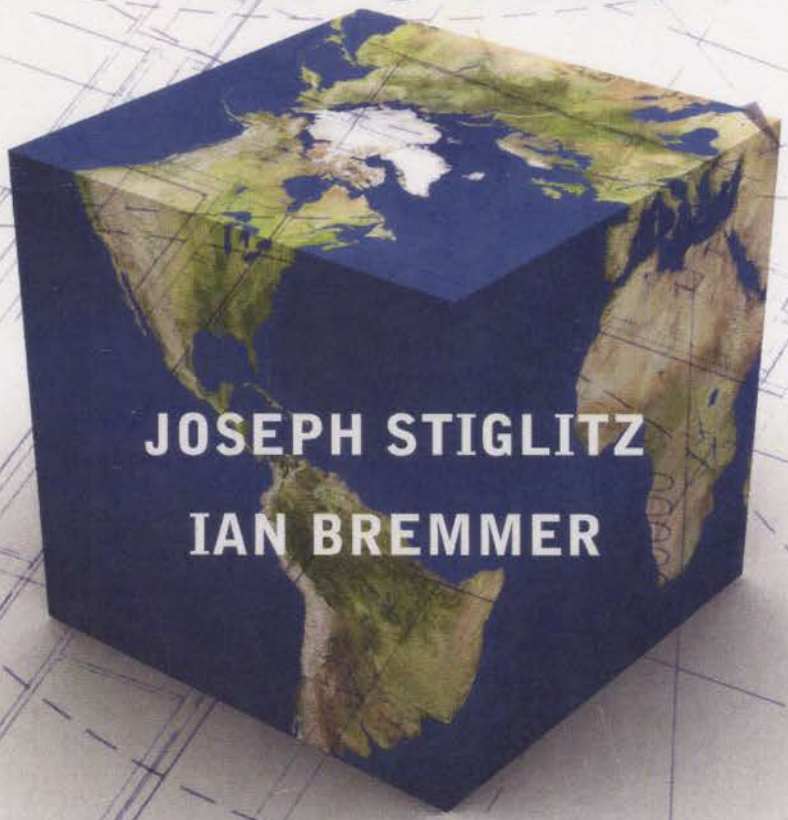
NPQ

New Perspectives Quarterly ▪ VOLUME 24 #1 ▪ WINTER 2007

MAKING GLOBALIZATION WORK



JOSEPH STIGLITZ

IAN BREMMER

ALSO: **KIM DAE JUNG** and **TSUNEO WATANABE**
ON THE ASIAN DRAMA

AYAAN HIRSI ALI AND **SAMUEL HUNTINGTON**
ON THE CULTURE CLASH CONTINUED

Culture Clash Continued

AYAAN HIRSI ALI ▪ SAMUEL HUNTINGTON

If ever proof were needed of Samuel Huntington's idea that "relations between societies in the coming decades are most likely to reflect their cultural commitments" it can be found in Ayaan Hirsi Ali's experience as a woman standing up against traditional Islamic culture while living in Europe.

In this section, both Samuel Huntington and Ayaan Hirsi Ali discuss the continuing clash of cultures in what Hirsi Ali calls our "age of confrontation."

The Clash of Civilizations Revisited

SAMUEL P. HUNTINGTON, *a Harvard professor, is famous for his 1996 book* The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order. *He was interviewed by Amina R. Chaudary of* Islamica Magazine.

NPQ | Your theory on the clash of civilizations argues that global politics today result from deep-seated conflicts between different cultures and religions. This thesis gained momentum as a result of Sept. 11, and now the war against terrorism is often defined in terms of the West against Islam as a fundamental clash. Do you feel that your thesis has been used or misused since 9/11? Would you moderate this view in any way?

SAMUEL HUNTINGTON | My view is that relations between countries in the coming decades are most likely to reflect their cultural commitments, their cultural ties and antagonism with other countries rather than other factors.

Quite obviously, power will continue to play a central role in global politics, as it always does. But usually there is something else behind conflicts. In the 18th century in Europe, the issues to a large extent involved questions of monarchy versus the emerging republican movements, first in America and then in France. In the 19th century, it involved states identifying themselves through nationalism. In the 20th century, ideology came to the fore, largely, but not exclusively, as a result of the Russian Revolution. We had fascism, communism and liberal democracy competing with each other.

Relations between countries in the coming decades are most likely to reflect their cultural commitments, their cultural ties and antagonism with other countries.

Well, that's pretty much over. Liberal democracy has come to be accepted, in theory at least, around the world, if not always in practice. So the question really is what will be the central focus of global politics in the coming decades?

My argument remains that cultural identities, antagonisms and affiliations will not only play a role, but play a major role in relations between states.

NPQ | You have written: "For 45 years, the Iron Curtain was the central dividing line in Europe. That line has moved several hundred miles east. It is now the line separating the peoples of Western Christianity, on the one hand, from Muslim and Orthodox peoples on the other."

Doesn't making such a dichotomous distinction between the West and Islam imply there is a uniformity within those two categories? Doesn't it ignore the reality that Islamic communities exist within the Western world?

HUNTINGTON | That implication is totally wrong. I don't suggest that the West is uniform. Obviously there are divisions within the West and divisions within Islam. There are different sects, different communities, different countries. So neither

Islam nor the West is homogenous at all. I don't think it is all that useful to think in terms of two solid blocs. But there is still commonality within. People everywhere talk about Islam and the West. Presumably that has some relationship to reality and has some meaning. Of course, the core of that reality is differences in religion.

NPQ | Is there any reconciliation or point of convergence between the two sides of this new "Iron Curtain"?

HUNTINGTON | As I've said, both sides have divisions. Western countries collaborate with Muslim countries and vice versa. It's a mistake, let me just repeat, to think in terms of two homogenous sides starkly confronting each other. Global politics remains extremely complex and countries have different interests, which will also lead them to make what might seem rather bizarre friends and allies. The United States has cooperated and still is cooperating with various military dictatorships around the world. Obviously we would prefer to see them democratized, but we are doing it because we have national interests, whether it's working with Pakistan or Afghanistan or whomever.

NPQ | You have argued that as civilization changes in America, it has moved toward focusing on democratic liberalism as an ideology.

HUNTINGTON | That always has been the American ideology. Since the revolution of the 18th century, America has basically had an ideology of liberal democracy and constitutionalism, though generally I try to avoid the use of the term ideology to describe this. I talk of American beliefs and values.

When you mention the word ideology, people have communism in the back of their minds, which was an entirely well-formulated ideology and statement of belief. You read the Communist Manifesto and you know what the core of it is. What we have, however, is a looser set of values and beliefs, which have remained fairly constant for two and a half centuries or so. And that's really rather striking.

People everywhere talk about Islam and the West. Presumably that has some relationship to reality and has some meaning. Of course, the core of that reality is differences in religion.

Obviously, changes and adaptations have occurred as a result of economic development, industrialization, the huge wave of immigrants that have come to this country, economic crisis, depression and world wars. But the core of the American set of beliefs has remained pretty constant.

If one of the drafters of the Declaration of Independence came back today, he would not be surprised about what Americans are saying and believing and articulating in their public statements. It would all sound rather familiar.

NPQ | How is the Muslim world faring in the context of a world that has mostly accepted, if in theory, not practice, liberal democracy?

HUNTINGTON | We've seen at least the beginnings of rather significant social and economic change in the Muslim world, which I think will in due course lead to

more political change. Obviously, Muslim societies, like societies elsewhere, are becoming increasingly urban, many are becoming industrial. But since so many have oil and gas, they don't have a great impetus to change.

At the same time, the revenue that natural resources produce gives them the capability to change. Countries like Iran are beginning to develop an industrial component.

NPQ | Do you think that the "Islamic civilization" will become increasingly coherent in the future?

HUNTINGTON | Certainly we've seen movements in that direction. Certainly there are various trans-Islamic political movements, which try to appeal to Muslims in all societies. But I am doubtful that there will be any sort of real coherence of Muslim societies as a single political system run by an elected or non-elected group of leaders.

Muslim societies, like societies elsewhere, are becoming increasingly urban, many are becoming industrial. But since so many have oil and gas, they don't have a great impetus to change.

But I think we can expect leaders of Muslim societies to cooperate with each other on many issues, just as Western societies cooperate with each other. I wouldn't rule out the possibility of Muslim, or at least Arab, countries developing some form of organization comparable to the European Union. I don't think that's very likely, but it conceivably could happen.

NPQ | You've written, "Islamic culture explains, in large part, the failure of democracy to emerge in much of the Muslim world." Yet large parts of the Muslim world have democracy—Indonesia, Mali, Senegal and even India, with its large population of Muslims. What is the connection, or lack of it?

HUNTINGTON | I don't know what the answer to that question is because I'm not an expert on Islam, but it is striking the relative slowness with which Muslim countries, particularly Arab countries, have moved toward democracy. Their cultural heritage and their ideologies may be in part responsible. The colonial experience they all went through may be a factor in the fight against Western domination, British, French or whatever. Many of these countries were, until recently, largely rural societies with landowning governing elites.

I think they are certainly moving toward urbanization and much more pluralistic political systems. In almost every Muslim country, that is occurring. Obviously, they are increasing their involvement with non-Muslim societies. One key aspect that will influence democratization, of course, is the migration of Muslims into Europe.

NPQ | What do you think of the argument made recently by your Harvard colleague Stephen Walt and John Mearsheimer, of the University of Chicago, that US foreign policy is disproportionately affected by pro-Israeli groups that do not act in the best interests of America. Do you think this argument has any merit?

HUNTINGTON | I think it's an argument that other people have to take

seriously. They are not polemicists by any means. I am not entirely persuaded by their argument, but I guess the word that caught my attention is "disproportionately." I don't know how you judge that. US foreign policy is in every area impacted by ethnic groups of one sort or another as well as economic groups and regional groups. There has been an Irish lobby that has impacted US foreign policy for a century and a half and at times made our relations with Great Britain very difficult. Other comparable lobbies exist.

The Israeli lobby is not unique. It may differ from the others because it is focused on just one issue—the survival of Israel as well as the promotion of aid to Israel.

NPQ | Do you believe that, as many argue, the reason for instability in the Middle East is directly and primarily linked to the tension between Israelis and Palestinians?

HUNTINGTON | Obviously there have been and still are fault lines of conflict in the Middle East between Israelis and Palestinians, but there have been plenty of other fault lines as well over the years—between Israel and Egypt, the struggles between various religious factions in Lebanon, between Baathist and opposition movements. There are lots of conflicts going on in the Middle East.

US foreign policy is in every area impacted by ethnic groups of one sort or another as well as economic groups and regional groups.

In terms of stability, it is unclear which country will emerge, if any, as the dominant or hegemonic power in the Middle East. In South America, we have Brazil; in Africa, we have South Africa; in Central Africa, we have Nigeria; in East Asia we have China and Japan; South Asia, India.

What is the comparable power in the Middle East? Israel has military capabilities, including nuclear weapons, far surpassing any other power in the Middle East, but it's a small country. The rest of the Middle Eastern peoples are Muslim and Israelis are not, so it is hardly in any position to become the leading power.

Iran is a possibility, though, of course, it is Shiite while the bulk of the Arabs are Sunni. That is a problem or could be a problem. Also, there is the simple fact that Iran is non-Arab and most of the Muslims in the Middle East are Arab.

Then there is the question of Turkey, which is an important state, but again it's not Arab and it has very concrete interests in the oil and gas in northern Iraq and in securing borders against secessionist movements.

So, what prospects are there for an Arab state serving a leading role comparable to the role that other states place in other regions? There is no obvious candidate. Saudi Arabia has the money but a relatively small population. Iraq was a great potential leader, as a sizable country with great oil resources and a highly educated population, but it went off in the wrong direction. Maybe Iraq will come back and become the dominant power among Arab countries. That seems conceivable.

NPQ | **Many tout Turkey as a bridge between the Western world and the Muslim world. Do you see that?**

HUNTINGTON | I wouldn't put a great deal of emphasis on that. Turkey has its own interests and, historically, Turkey conquered most of the Arab world, and the Arabs had to fight wars of liberation to free themselves from the Turks. That's in the past, of course, and doesn't necessarily shape what is going to happen. But it's there in people's memories.

NPQ | **Is it in the interest of the US to ensure that no regional hegemonic power emerges?**

HUNTINGTON | That all depends on who that hegemonic leader is. In theory, the US finds it much easier to deal with situations where there is a leading country. You can go to the leaders of that country and say, for example, to India, "There are all these problems in Bangladesh, we really have to do something about it, what do you suggest we can do to work out a common policy?" But when you don't have the equivalent of India, you have to go capital to capital trying to put together a coalition, which is extraordinarily difficult, especially in the Arab world, because of the historic rivalries and branches of Islam.

In the coming decades, questions of identity, meaning cultural heritage, language and religion, will play a central role in politics.

NPQ | **Your colleague Amartya Sen at Harvard criticizes your civilizational thesis, saying that "identity is not destiny" and that each individual can construct and reconstruct chosen identities. He argues that the clash-of-civilizations theory suggests a "miniaturization of human beings" into "unique and choiceless" identities that fit into"boxes of civilization." What is your perspective on citizens who have multiple identities?**

HUNTINGTON | I think that statement by Amartya Sen is totally wrong. I never argued that, and I realize that people have multiple identities. What I argue in my book, as I indicated earlier, is that the basis of association and antagonism among countries has changed over time. In the coming decades, questions of identity, meaning cultural heritage, language and religion, will play a central role in politics. I first elaborated this idea over 10 years ago, and much of what I said has been validated during that time.

NPQ | **How do people with multiple identities negotiate that?**

HUNTINGTON | They work out accommodations, and that's been done for the past two or three centuries, at least. When you have increased migration of peoples and ethnic and religious minorities, you develop a set of rules and language the larger society can accept and the minority community can accept.

The larger society has to recognize some degree of autonomy for the minority: the right to practice their own religion and way of life and to some extent their language.

Many of the most difficult questions concerning the role of ethnic minorities centers on language. To what extent are they educated in their own language or in the national language? To what extent does the society formally or informally become a country of two national languages? Or is only one language used in the public proceedings, courts, legislatures, executive branch and politics? These, as we know, can become very tricky issues.

The problem is when these fundamentalist attitudes get out of hand and become the dominant factor in a society, which can only lead to the oppression of minorities or even to war with neighboring societies with differing cultures.

NPQ | How do you think that fundamentalism—the radical idea that one's own identity is superior to all others—influences global politics today? Do you think there is a particular radicalism that is only associated with Islam, or do you think it exists in all faiths?

HUNTINGTON | I think fundamentalism is what you said: this radical attitude toward one's own identity and civilization as compared to other people's identities and cultures. Fundamentalist tendencies and movements have existed in all societies and civilizations. Certainly here in the US, we've had fundamentalist movements that have taken very critical and hostile attitudes toward immigration and the assimilation of immigrants into our society and culture. So these tendencies are fairly universal.

The problem is when these fundamentalist attitudes get out of hand and become the dominant factor in a society, which can only lead to the oppression of minorities or even to war with neighboring societies with differing cultures. That's why it's important to try to keep these tendencies toward extremism under control.

NPQ | Why are there more tensions among Muslims and other groups in European societies as opposed to America, where Muslims seem to be better adjusted? How would this relate to your thesis about identity and culture in regard to Hispanic communities in the US?

HUNTINGTON | First of all, the biggest difference as far as Muslims in Europe and America are concerned is that the number of Muslims in America is small compared to the number in Europe. Second, those that are here have come across several thousands of miles of oceans, not just walked across the border or taken a short boat ride across the Mediterranean.

We don't border on Muslim countries. European countries do, and that seems to be a fundamental difference.

How does the position of Muslims in Europe compare to the position of Hispanics in the US? There are fundamental differences because the US has always been an immigrant country. The Hispanics who come here are largely from Mexico and South America. They are Catholics, but that is an American religion. One-third of our population is Catholic, so that does not have the same impact as Muslims coming into Europe. They speak Spanish or Portuguese, which are languages we are familiar

with, so it doesn't seem to pose the same types of problems as Arabic-speaking Muslims do in Europe.

The major difference for us with respect to Hispanic immigration is that it is so large and it is coming from neighboring countries rather than those countries off the Atlantic or Pacific. That creates different issues and different problems for us as compared to the past. It is still very different, however, from the situation in Europe, where we see people with a very different non-European religion coming from neighboring countries.

The major difference for us with respect to Hispanic immigration is that it is so large and it is coming from neighboring countries rather than those countries off the Atlantic or Pacific.

▲