

RE-CONCEPTUALIZING GLOBAL CONFLICTS: FROM US VERSUS THEM TO US VERSUS *THEN*

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*Much of the contemporary literature in the field of international relations attempts to explain Muslim/Western relations in an adversarial context. Arguments are defined in hostile rather than helpful terms that perpetuate a widening rather than a narrowing view of the potential for peace. By continually dividing contemporary world politics into a conflicting narrative, these scholars have proclaimed that Islam and the West are distinctive and incompatible. Scholars who contribute to this conflicting narrative deny individuals (and their respective societies) the opportunity to reach favorable outcomes. In this paper, we will attempt to reformulate this adversarial agenda by eliminating the Us vs. Them mentality that has dominated much of the scholarship. Instead, we will argue that an examination of Islamic/Western relations must be re-examined according to an **Us vs. Then** discussion, which will allow the actors the opportunity to formulate peaceful rather than hostile conclusions.*

KEYWORDS

Foreign policy, conflict, Islam, identity, peace studies

BIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENTS

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Much of the contemporary literature in the field of international relations attempts to explain Muslim/Western relations in an adversarial context. Arguments are defined in *hostile* rather than *helpful* terms that perpetuate a widening rather than a narrowing view of the potential for peace. By continually dividing contemporary world politics into a conflicting narrative, these scholars have proclaimed that Islam and the West are distinctive and incompatible. Scholars who contribute to this conflicting narrative deny individuals (and their respective societies) the opportunity to reach favorable outcomes. In this paper, we will attempt to reformulate this adversarial agenda by eliminating the *Us vs. Them* mentality that has dominated much of the scholarship. Instead, we will argue that an examination of Islamic/Western relations must be re-examined according to an *Us vs. Then* discussion, which will allow the actors the opportunity to formulate peaceful rather than hostile conclusions.

In order to re-conceptualize this dichotomy, we must first examine the ideological divisions that have been expressed in the modern narrative and prove that they are flawed in their assessment of international relations. Beginning with the bipolarity of the Cold War narrative and Huntington's "Clash of Civilizations," we will address the overall tendency of academics and policymakers to perpetuate division based upon the creation of a Self versus 'the Other' mentality; a model that has persisted in the contemporary world. Following this analysis, we will turn our attention to certain contemporary developments such as those issues affecting the Middle East, i.e. the Israeli-Palestinian question, American imperialism, terrorism and the War on Terror in both Afghanistan and Iraq, and the ways that this negative model of Us versus Them has persisted.

Finally, we will argue that a new model of understanding international affairs is necessary for the creation of a lasting peace. In order to properly examine the relationship between Islam and the West, one must describe it in *Us versus Then* terms; a positive distinction that properly addresses the politics between the White (skin) Man and the White (dress) Man and its repercussions for the world. In doing so, we will address the notion of a coexistence (not a clash) of civilizations reliant on the historical reality of Islam and the West; namely their enduring relationship in Western Europe and North America. This assessment will perpetuate greater cooperation amongst groups continuously referred to in competitive terms and promote positive lessons from the pre-modern era for modern politics.

The Cold War Narrative: An Unfortunate and Enduring Framework

To properly examine contemporary developments in international relations, one must be willing to utilize new methods of analysis. Too often, scholars and policymakers have attempted to explain modern phenomena by employing preexisting notions and narratives. When analyzing the contemporary relationship between Muslims and non-

Muslims, scholars have continued to promote the bipolar (East versus West) analysis so widely accepted during the Cold War. With a focus on religious, cultural, and political differences, contemporary scholarship has consistently portrayed international relations in a hostile, bipolar struggle.¹ While this explanation seems plausible, it overlooks a great deal of historical evidence to the contrary and seeks to enhance division rather than unity. The following section will examine the flaws of the Cold War system's model in explaining post-Cold War phenomena. We will argue that its attractiveness as a model for explaining contemporary events is based on two flawed assumptions. First, we will argue that the duration of the competitive, bipolar ideology (East versus West), created during the Cold War, has led to the current analysis of peace as a product of stabilized conflict. Although scholarship has indicated that Cold War tensions were related to international stability, this analysis is no longer relevant in a post-Cold War world.

Second, we will examine the linkage of ideology with territory and culture, i.e. the formation of the Self and the *Other* mentality. Because the Cold War narrative associated communism with the Soviet Union (East) and capitalism with the United States (West), a divide was created based upon a geographic and cultural association. The West was portrayed (by those in the West) as progressive, secular, and market-oriented, while the East was portrayed as restrictive, authoritarian, and communistic. This association defined the Cold War and established the framework that led to Huntington's analysis of the post-Cold War world.

Problems with Bipolarity in the Contemporary World

For forty-five years international relations had been depicted in bipolar terms. Culminating in Kenneth Waltz's *Theory of International Politics* and Ted Hopf's "Polarity, the Offense-Defense Balance and War", scholars had come to accept the notion that bipolar conflict was a necessary and positive feature of international stability.² John Gaddis's description of the Cold War as "The Long Peace" perpetuated the present-day acceptance that nuclear deterrence created the tension that was necessary to preserve stability.³ It was believed that as long as the Soviet Union and its ideological and/or territorial compatriots were at odds with the United States and its ideological and/or territorial compatriots, the world would remain at a low level of hostility.

¹ The best examples of this contemporary scholarship are Samuel Huntington's, "The Clash of Civilizations" (*Foreign Affairs*, Summer 1993) and Benjamin Barber's, *Jihad versus McWorld: Terrorism's Challenge to Democracy* (Random House, 2001).

² Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, NY: New York (McGraw-Hill, 1979) and Ted Hopf, "Polarity, the Offense-Defense Balance and War" (*American Political Science Review*, 1991): 475-93, argued that rigidity between the two poles of conflict produce the greatest level of international stability.

³ Gaddis' book, *The Long Peace* (Oxford University Press, 1987) outlined the mutually assured destruction (MAD) policies of the United States and the Soviet Union as being responsible for the prevention of nuclear war.

While these explanations appear appropriate, it is important to analyze their claims. First, these assertions suggest that global stability, the grandest and most challenging form of stability is only possible amidst a backdrop created and maintained by two superpowers. This logic emerged from the belief that only the most powerful states possess the capabilities to determine the collective outcomes of all the peoples of the world. Based upon the notion of a *bipolar* balance of power, IR scholars turned to the most powerful states to determine the objectives of all others. Because the United States and the Soviet Union possessed the largest surpluses of nuclear arms and the ability to control the collective destinies of their respective allies and enemies, their power was perceived as the only legitimately *global* source of authority.

Secondly, and more importantly, there existed the belief that the tension caused by the nuclear capabilities of the two superpowers created a rigidity that was successful in deterring worldwide destruction. As Schlesinger noted, this “mortal antagonism... between the two rigidly hostile blocs” created a perception of a standstill, rather than an openly hostile environment.⁴ In other words, the bipolarity created an acceptable level of tension between the superpowers. Political tensions that had led to the outbreak of previous world wars were regarded as improbable because of what Kissinger referred to as the emergence of a *threshold of risk*.⁵ Based on the other side’s “fear of nuclear conflagration,” this “*threshold of risk*...preserved the peace for half a century.”⁶

While this explanation fostered an insightful perspective on Cold War relations, it also purported the notion that a combination of fear and power among ideologically-opposed political behemoths is essential to global stability. It was this claim that has caused the greatest impact in the contemporary world. When Waltz and later, Hopf argued that bipolarity as a concept is not only explanatory of the Cold War, but superior as a source of global stability (to both unipolarity and multipolarity), they provided the rationale for the continuation of an *Us versus Them* framework. Because bipolarity was recognized as not only the best way to define Cold War relations, but also as a concept whose principles are superior to all others, those interested in explaining international relations will feel compelled to continue to use this framework. In many ways, this is precisely what has occurred in the years that have followed the collapse of the Soviet Union and has grown to greater heights since 9/11. Scholars and policymakers alike have depicted the *struggle between two incompatible civilizations*.

⁴ Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr’s, *The Cycles of American History* (Mariner Books, 1967): p. 22 argued that the threat of nuclear war was often quieted by the tension of the superpowers.

⁵ Henry Kissinger’s *Diplomacy* (Simon and Schuster, 1994): p. 607. This “threshold of risk” was deemed powerful enough to dissuade nuclear war.

⁶ *Ibid*, 607.

Linking Ideology, Culture, and Territory: Perpetuating the Self vs. The Other

In the jargon of international relations, it appears that Islam has replaced the Soviet Union as the *Other*, and is commonly portrayed as both a religion and a way of life that is ideologically opposed to the West. In many ways, this portrayal is based upon the tendency of policymakers to place competitive labels on groups that they feel must be portrayed as enemy combatants. During the Cold War, American policymakers defined communists according to their sympathy to both an ideology and to the Soviet Union. In the contemporary setting, certain scholars and policymakers have equated the term ‘Muslim’ with the term ‘Islamist’ or ‘jihadist’ and affixed this confused label to all of those who inhabit (or had inhabited) parts of the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia. Thus, the term ‘jihadist’ has become the dominant descriptor of all those who share the Muslim faith and must possess a worldview that is contrary to those in the West. To maintain this ideological continuum, just as the terms ‘communist’ and ‘Soviet’ became interchangeable, so too have the terms ‘Muslim’ and ‘jihadist.’

Although most of the literature pertaining to the formation of the *Other* in the field of political science has emerged from those engaged in the study of nationalism, ethnic conflict, and genocide, it is also useful as way of explaining bipolar hostility. In a world that is defined by bipolarity, an *Us versus Them* framework is unavoidable. States will promote their own agenda/identity in contrast to their enemies’ agenda/identity for two major reasons: 1.) to maintain the necessary international tension/stability and 2.) to make the complexity of foreign policy more manageable for ordinary citizens.

During the Cold War, the bipolarity dictated the hostility between East and West. The Soviet Union was portrayed (by the United States) as the “Evil Empire” whose system of rule was based upon an antidemocratic, authoritarian ideology. The United States on the other hand, was portrayed (by the Soviet Union) as the purveyors of inequality and imperialism. Because bipolarity dictates the survival of two major actors/ideologies, both sides were actively engaged in the perpetuation of the *Us versus Them* mentality.

According to both Stouffer and Rosenberg the changing political landscape of the Cold War perpetuated a change in the depiction of allies and enemies.⁷ The once beloved caricature of “Uncle Joe” Stalin, so useful as an ally during World War II, had transformed into the embodiment of totalitarianism, while communism, the ideology of

⁷ S.A. Stouffer’s, *Communism, Conformity, and Civil Liberties* (NY: Doubleday Press, 1955) and Milton F. Rosenberg’s chapter, “Images in Relation to the Policy Process: American Public Opinion on Cold War Issues,” in Herbert C. Kelman’s *International Behavior* (NY: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1965) both demonstrated the necessity of identity transformation in the popular press.

the Soviet Union had become the defining ideological antithesis of the “American way of life.”⁸ The fear and threat of fascism that had characterized much of the support for World War II, was replaced by the fear and threat of communism.

In much the same way, the Soviet Union was committed to the perpetuation of its own *Us Versus Them* mentality to justify its actions and expansion. Soviet rhetoric was filled with ideological slander directed against capitalism and the West. American life was portrayed as self-indulgent and corrupt. In an article written at the dawn of the Cold War entitled, “The American Villain on the Soviet Stage,” Andrew M. Hanfman chronicled the development of the Soviet theater and suggested that it was a necessary vehicle for Soviet propaganda. In the world of Soviet drama:

“The American villain is always outwardly respectable, but inside he is sheer darkness and devilry. His strong will is directed towards inhuman objectives. He lacks human warmth and even human frailty. He is a solid, compact piece of ill-will and soulless egotism. Love appears in him and for him only as a sexual impulse...Socially, the villain belongs to either the financial aristocracy, the upper-middle class, or is on his way to climb the social ladder. His preferred occupations are either politics or high finance. The latter profession is exposed as containing the most wretched and fanatical villains at the top of the American scale of wickedness.”⁹

The *American* was the embodiment of the *Other* in Soviet life. He was consistently depicted as a fervent capitalist committed to greed and scandal with a smile on his face.

As the Cold War progressed, certain studies were conducted to determine the reasons behind such negative depictions. According to Richard Herrmann, negative depictions were a practical manner of informing the general public on foreign policy issues. By allowing ordinary citizens the opportunity to visualize and better understand a basic composite of the enemy, each superpower also provided its people the opportunity to formulate opinions concerning its state’s foreign policy.¹⁰ Hurwitz and Peffley have suggested that this is both a common and necessary feature of foreign identity formulation.¹¹ They argue that “ordinary citizens operate under a considerable handicap

⁸ This conceptual transformation of “Uncle Joe” Stalin into the bloodthirsty, anti-American, communist was further recognized by D.J. Finlay, Ole R. Holsti, and R.R. Fagen in their book, *Enemies in Politics* (Rand McNally, 1967).

⁹ Andrew M. Hanfman, “The American Villain on the Soviet Stage,” *Russian Review*, Vol. 10, No.2 (1951): pp. 141-142, argued that the Soviets continually depicted the American as unethical in both his private and public life. Plays became vehicles by which American values were trampled and held in contempt.

¹⁰ Richard Herrmann, “The Power of Perceptions in Foreign Policy Decision-Making: Do Views of the Soviet Union Determine the Policy Choices of American Leaders,” *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 30, No.4 (Nov. 1986): pp. 841-875.

¹¹ John Hurwitz and Mark Peffley, “Public Images of the Soviet Union: The Impact on Foreign Policy

in the international arena” and therefore, “rely on *postures*—or, broad, abstract beliefs regarding the general direction the government should take.”¹² This abstraction allows the general public the opportunity to identify the connection between the ideology of the state and the state itself. Without this myopic and rudimentary perception, the state would not be able to justify its foreign policy initiatives to its citizens in any meaningful way.

Huntington and the Continuation of the Cold War Dynamic

With the end of the Cold War came the emergence of what scholars had described (and continue to describe) as the era of globalization. Defined by its lack of national political coherency and stability, increases in the availability and capability of information technology, and widespread market liberalization, globalization has been described as a system where chaos rules. Leading scholars have suggested that globalization has the potential to erode the *traditional* sovereignty of the nation-state and compel individuals to find new allegiances and allies. Globalization has its scholarly advocates and its scholarly opponents. It is the source of both protest and praise.

In addition to scholarship that pertains to the explanation of *new* economic and technological trends, the era of globalization has also witnessed a rise in scholarship dedicated to explaining *new* forms of conflict. Unfortunately, most of the literature that has attempted to explain these *new* types of conflict is based on *traditional* explanations of conflict. In his famous article, “The Clash of Civilizations,” Samuel Huntington suggested that the demise of the Soviet Union had brought about the end of the “Western-phase” of history and that the new center of global conflict would be based upon “the interaction between the West and non-Western civilizations.”¹³ Huntington indirectly credited the stability of the Cold War for the perpetuation of Western Civilization at the expense of non-Western civilization. In doing so, he claimed to have presented several new ideas concerning contemporary international relations: 1) that non-Western peoples will have both the ability and the desire to achieve power in the world and 2) that a conflict will emerge because of this empowerment.

This assessment is worth consideration because Huntington’s claims gave a rationale to both radical Islamic fundamentalists (East) and neo-conservative policymakers (West). Both ideological camps desired a conceptual bipolar division and an enemy to ensure power and relevancy in the world. Huntington’s thesis argued that globalization has created both a host of new “global players” and a new framework for evaluation. What Huntington’s assessment neglected however, was his continued reliance

Attitudes,” *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 52, No.1 (Feb. 1990): pp. 3-28.

¹² Ibid, p. 4.

¹³ Samuel Huntington’s, “The Clash of Civilizations,” *Foreign Affairs*, (Summer 1993): p. 23.

on a Cold War bipolar division and the necessity of the perpetuation of a conflicting narrative.

While Huntington was correct in his assessment that more individuals now have greater opportunities for global penetration, he was incorrect in his portrayal of the differences between them and the world in which they operate. The remainder of this paper will be concerned with a critique of Huntington's East versus West analysis. It will base its criticisms on two main areas. First, it will demonstrate Huntington's reliance on the model of bipolarity developed during the Cold War. Though Huntington's analysis attempted to explain hostility according to the "cultural (and not ideological) differences along the fault lines of civilizations," it continued to explain international affairs in an ideologically perpetuated "Us versus Them" construct; reminiscent of the Cold War era.

Second, we will argue that Huntington's analysis has ignored a great deal of historical evidence concerning the relationship between Islam and the West. Huntington's thesis described the replacement of an "Iron Curtain of ideology" with a "Velvet Curtain of culture," the line in Europe that divides East from West. With historical evidence to the contrary, we will contend that this "fault line" has not been as divisive and violent as Huntington contended, and in fact, has provided the purveyors of the Us versus Them narrative (Islamic fundamentalists and neo-conservatives) with a convincing, yet misleading portrayal of Muslim/non-Muslim relations.

Huntington's Contemporary Bipolarity

In 1990, John J. Mearsheimer published an article in *The Atlantic Monthly* entitled, "Why We Will Soon Miss The Cold War."¹⁴ Synthesizing the arguments of Gaddis and Waltz, Mearsheimer argued that for purposes of "Western" stability, the United States must continue its military hegemony over Western Europe. For Mearsheimer, the *antagonism* that properly defined Cold War bipolarity served as a proper model for future international stability. In essence, Mearsheimer argued that the Cold War hegemony of the United States not only controlled the destructive dual European tendencies of hyper-nationalism and multipolarity, but also unified *Western* culture and ideology. In doing so, he called on 1.) policymakers to maintain/pursue a necessary level of tension and 2.) academics to discover an ideological/political heir to the Soviet Union; one perceived as powerful enough to balance Western power.¹⁵

¹⁴ John J. Mearsheimer, "Why We Will Soon Miss The Cold War," *The Atlantic Monthly* (August 1990): pp. 35-50.

¹⁵ This is not to say that Mearsheimer endorsed any "suitable" enemy. However, by forcefully arguing that the United States and its Western allies had experienced "peace" during the Cold War restated the notion that "security" and "peace" are interchangeable.

In 1993, Samuel P. Huntington provided the most compelling argument for both of Mearsheimer's conclusions. Underlying the prevailing notion that the Cold War had perpetuated global stability through ideological/military tension, Huntington presented a strong case for the new sources of conflict in the post-Cold War world. According to Huntington, the new sources of conflict would emerge from *clashing civilizations*; namely that of the West and the world of Islam. Because the Cold War had created boundaries between the East and West, the Western world remained divided from the Eastern World. With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the elimination of the Iron Curtain, Huntington proclaimed that "civilization identity will be increasingly important" and that "the most important conflicts of the future will occur along the cultural fault lines separating these civilizations from one another."¹⁶

For Huntington, there also existed an *inevitability* to this *new* type of conflict because of the *basic* differences that define civilizations.

The people of different civilizations have different views on the relations between God and man, the individual and the group, the citizen and the state, parents and children, husband and wife, as well as differing views of the relative importance of rights and responsibilities, liberty and authority, equality and hierarchy. These differences are the products of centuries. They will not soon disappear. They are far more fundamental than differences among political ideologies and political regimes.¹⁷

Thus, the differences between Islam (East) and the West are so severe and *fundamental* that they fail to conform to accepted models of international relations. His dismissal of traditional sources of authority (states) in light of non-traditional sources of authority (civilizations) perpetuated the belief that the end of the Cold War created a new model by which to explain international relations.

Although Huntington was correct in his first claim that "world politics is entering a new phase," the manner of his argument is anything but novel. "The Clash of Civilizations" attempted to explain global conflict and patterns of change at a higher level of sovereignty based upon "cultural" rather than "ideological" differences. What Huntington did however, was to rely upon *established* models of international relations to explain such differences. The motivations and desires of these civilizations directly reflect longstanding realist claims of statecraft and security.

Suggesting that Western civilization has made attempts to intrude on the defense strategies and nuclear proliferation of non-Western peoples, i.e. Confucian, Islamic civilizations, Huntington maintained that a "Sino-Muslim" partnership will be forged to

¹⁶ Huntington, p. 25.

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 26.

handle such mandates.¹⁸ This theory, which further perpetuated the tendency to create an *Us versus Them* framework, underscored Huntington's desire to analyze the world in conflicting bipolarity. The only difference between Huntington's analysis and the underlying, traditional characteristics of realism is his repositioning of what has traditionally constituted East and West. In the mindset of the Western scholar, the East continues to be the bearer of *archaic* tendencies and outdated views on issues related to women's rights, religion, democracy, etc. This appraisal suggests that Huntington merely detached the Soviet Union from the established bipolar framework and replaced its political influence with that of a new ideological foe, Islam.

Neoconservatives, Fundamentalists, and the “Inevitable” Clash

By replacing one ideological foe with another, scholars and policymakers have continued to perpetuate division as a source of international stability and domestic comprehension. The “East versus West” dynamic is predicated upon the notion that this *division* is factual. The negative inherency dictates not only division, but a *clash* as well. Private individuals caught amidst the seemingly factual division are therefore forced to choose sides in what they perceive as a necessary and actual struggle.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the ousting of Saddam Hussein's military from Kuwait, the most critical event in the development of this newly modeled Us versus Them, *Islam versus The West* dynamic, was the failure of the Oslo Peace process. This failure was pivotal because it created an atmosphere that allowed both Israelis and Palestinians, not to mention neoconservatives and Islamic radicals, the opportunity to justify their own violence. By the time of the second intifada resulting in both the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin and a number of Israeli military reprisals, the ideologies between East and West were being rewritten as boundaries were being redrawn.

According to Gilles Kepel in *The War for Muslim Minds*, both Islamic radicals and the neoconservatives in Washington shared an immediate goal: the reorganization of the Middle East's leaders and governments.¹⁹ Although both sides had different reasons for their desire to *reshuffle* the governments of the Middle East, both neoconservative policymakers and radical Islamic fundamentalists strongly advocated the use of force to achieve these goals. Both sides continued to utilize formations of ‘the Other’ which were beneficial to their causes. The neoconservatives created an argument that linked authoritarianism with terrorism (justifying the invasions of Afghanistan in October 2001

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 43.

¹⁹ Gilles Kepel, *The War for Muslim Minds: Islam and the West* (Harvard University Press, 2004). The book discussed the idea that elites in both traditional and non-traditional political circles were focused on changing the existing structure of the Middle East.

and Iraq in March 2003), while leaders of Al Qaeda linked authoritarianism with the suppression of Islam.

By repositioning realist claims, both sides continued the argument in fatalistic and inevitable terms. Essentially the argument was centered on the notion that the Middle East *must* be burdened with war because 1.) there is no other way of resolving deep-seated ideological differences and 2.) a war based on a bipolar, ideological division is ultimately beneficial because of its inherent stability. As Waltz argued, bipolarity is preferable to all other balance of power scenarios because it divides the “inevitable clash” between two, rational actors who understand the consequences of each other’s actions. Unfortunately, it also eliminates the potential for the creation of a lasting peace in a region that desperately needs it. The following section written by Dr. S.P. Udayakumar will conclude the work. It is an appraisal of the status quo and a call for transcending and transforming the current identity dilemma. In other words, it will take the status quo *Us versus Them* and transform it into the future of Us versus *Then*.

The Future is Hopeful

Unlike both the past and the present, the future provides individuals with the opportunity to transcend conflicts and embrace positive outcomes. However, rarely are we presented with a view of the future that is fluid, and therefore honest. Instead we allow scholars to ascribe the ‘logic’ of the past to that of the future without any intellectual constraints. Peace scholars and futurists understand that *past* conflicts become *present* conflicts through this hopeless logic. Therefore, what is necessary is an honest reevaluation of the future by a reevaluation of the supposed logic of the past.

When Huntington’s famous thesis began to reassert itself after the attacks of September 11, 2001, academics, citizens, and politicians became polarized over its assertions. Had we entered a new phase of human conflict? Was the world split along basic, fundamental, and therefore *static* values? Was humanity truly divided by an Us versus Them label? Although the argument was straightforward, the logic was flawed in two serious ways. First, it spelled out a vision of the future that was incongruent with the past and present realities of the major religions. The thesis largely overlooked the indelible marks of both Judaism and Christianity on Islam (the agreement of which had traditionally been based upon the concept of “just war” theory), and uniformly exaggerated the cohesion of both East and West. Neither the West nor Islam has a political center; the definitions are purposefully broad to elicit past understandings of international arrangements like those of the Cold War and to invoke a feeling of inevitable conflict.

Secondly, and more importantly, the *clash* thesis presented a vision of the future that was predetermined. The array of possibilities that best define the future was silenced; replaced with a vision of the future reflected in the mirror of the past. The names ‘Islamist’ and ‘Westerner’ replaced the outdated labels ‘Communist’ and ‘Capitalist.’ A new nuclear era was developing in the shadow of the old, thereby making the present tenable and the future predictable. The simplicity of a bipolar, civilizational argument makes it all the more dangerous. The world comprises just two groups, the noble Us and the ignoble Them, the White (Dress) Man and the White (Skin) Man; groups that are locked up in a David versus Goliath clash that will result in the annihilation of the other.

The White (Dress) Man and the White (Skin) Man

The most dangerous aspect of this social construction is that it has been largely perpetuated by that of the ‘Other.’ We have been led to believe that the many fissures that had existed within Islam have been slowly eliminated by the creation of a *global umma*; an Islamic brotherhood committed to the destruction of the West. Although this construct is mired in violence and an apocalyptic vision of the future, it is essentially a reconstruction of a hopeless past. This reconstruction plays upon the sentiments of Muslims in a manner that is neither honest nor helpful. In this guise, the imperial West, exemplified as the White (Skin) Man, is seen as imperialistic, un-Godly, and overly indulgent; everything that the White (Dress) Man abhors.

The White (Skin) Man on the other hand, sees things differently. For him, the White (Dress) Man looks so dangerous and deadly as suicide bombers, jihadists, hijackers, and terrorists. For them, there is a common Islamic enemy out there. A Muslim is a terrorist or at the least, a potential terrorist. Despite all of the politically correct statements and sentiments expressed publicly for international political consumption, the popular image is that anyone that has to do with Islam (even remotely) is a potential jihadist or an abettor or a sympathizer of jihadism. This simplistic threat perception seriously distorts the threat assessment and that has severe implications for the strategies to deal with it. The enemy is everywhere, within and without.

From Us versus Them to Us versus “Then”

Today, as in the past (and in the future) there is no such monolithic, global Muslim entity. The Muslim community is diverse and comprises people of different nationalities and distinct social, cultural, and political backgrounds. To lump them all together and to label Muslims as Islamists is missing this diversity. It must be

remembered that it is the shortsighted vision of a few doomsayers who are the real threats to both Islam and a future peace.

Nothing serves to galvanize a people more than a perceived threat. It has been the threat of the future predicted by those with their eyes on the past who have made the differences so stark. Isolating and implicating groups based on preconceived notions is dangerous and must be avoided. Instead we should be preoccupied with not the *clash* of civilizations, but the *harmony* of civilizations. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. However how does one accomplish it? By having a dialogue *within* and *between* groups. The dialogue within and between civilizations will result in harmony of civilizations. The strategic security constructions based in such inner and outer dialogues will bring about inner peace and outer harmony.

The *Us* would include the ‘all of us,’ excluding them. There would be no *them*, but only *then*, the common future. Identity constructions have important time and space considerations. Self and The Other are often expounded in the *present* time. The knowledge of the past marked by the Glory of the self, the Myths about the Other and the traumas suffered at the hands of the Other is often helpful. Even the fantasies about the future will seek to regain the Glory, reestablish the Myths and give the right punishment to the Other are all important. But the relationship is always rooted in the present.

When we emphasize dialogue within and between the two entities, we add a third dimension to this relationship. The simple two dimensional ‘Time-Space’ graph suddenly takes on an intricate third dimension composed of humanness, humaneness, and humanism. The three dimensional expansive space holds all of us and looks outside into the future, a period that can be understood in terms of both time and space. Thus the future becomes real. Philosophically speaking, the future *is*. The future also becomes the appointed time for a reconsideration of the Self-Other relationship.

In this Us and Then relationship, ‘human security’ considerations are much larger than national, religious, and ethnic (security) considerations. Freedom from want, freedom from fear, freedom from indignities, freedom from inabilities, and other such freedoms prevail. We become more human and human future becomes more promising.