Religion, Culture, and International Conflict After September 11
A Conversation with Samuel P. Huntington

In January 2002 two dozen journalists gathered at the Pier House in Key West, Florida, at the invitation of the Ethics and Public Policy Center for a two-day seminar. Its purpose was to enhance journalistic understanding of current religious and cultural issues. The session from which this “Conversation” is drawn featured Harvard political scientist Samuel P. Huntington, author of the highly acclaimed book *The Clash of Civilizations*. His remarks here are followed by an edited version of the ensuing general discussion, moderated by Center vice president Michael Cromartie. These seminars for journalists are made possible by a generous grant from the Pew Charitable Trusts.

Michael Cromartie: This gathering was originally scheduled for September 24-25, 2001, with a quite different subject: the faith-based initiative controversy. On September 11, Samuel Huntington traveled from Boston to Washington on a flight that left Logan Airport shortly before the two planes that were flown into the World Trade Center. Dr. Huntington has taught at Harvard for nearly fifty years. He has been director of the John M. Olin Institute for Strategic Studies and is now chairman of the Harvard Academy for International and Area Studies. During the Carter administration he was director of security planning for the National Security Council. Dr. Huntington’s best-known book, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, holds that “global politics is being reconfigured along cultural lines.”

Samuel P. Huntington: Everyone would agree that important things changed after September 11, particularly with respect to Americans’ sense of safety. The last time we had suffered anything at all comparable in the continental United States was when the British burned the White House in 1814. For almost two centuries after that we lived in an atmosphere of invulnerability from foreign attack. Now that has disappeared.

As for global politics, it clearly has changed to some degree since September 11, although I would say only to a relatively moderate degree. The big changes in global politics occurred not four months ago but ten years ago, with the collapse of the Soviet Union. That was when many of the central trends evident in global politics today materialized. September 11 has affected those trends to a significant but not overwhelming degree.

Four major changes have occurred in global politics over the course of the past decade. The first is the extent to which culture has replaced ideology as a source of identity, changing the affiliations and antagonisms in world affairs. This is the main theme of my book *The Clash of Civilizations*, and I think it is a tremendously significant development. What my friend Frank Fukuyama was really talking about in his book *The End of History* is the end of ideology as a significant factor in world politics. (He couldn’t use that title because Daniel Bell had written a book called *The End of Ideology* thirty years before.) The century of ideology, the twentieth century, is over, and it seems to me that culture, cultural identity, ethnic, linguistic, traditional, and religious identity—these things now play central roles in global politics.

The second major change is that in the past decade or so there has been a tremendous resurgence of religion in societies all over the world. During the twentieth century, a secular century, Lenin, Ataturk, Nehru, Ben Gurion, and the Shah all defined the identity of their countries in the secular century’s modern terms. That has changed. The Shah is gone. The Soviet Union is gone, and in its place is a Russia that in public statements identifies it-
self quite explicitly with Russian Orthodoxy. In Turkey, India, and Israel, major political movements are challenging the secular definition of national identity. Politicians in many societies have found that religion either is crucial to maintaining their legitimacy as rulers or must be suppressed because it presents a challenge to that legitimacy.

One interesting example, it seems to me, is Greece, which was very much a participant in our coalition against the Soviet Union. Now it has become a close partner of Russia, and Orthodoxy is emphasized as part of Greek identity. Two years ago there was a big controversy when the Greek government decided, under pressure from the European Union, to remove religion as a category on its national identity card. That led to huge protests and debates. The removal eventually happened, but the controversy was an indication of the centrality of Orthodoxy to Greek identity. Three years ago the president of Greece said, “Today we do not face any threat from the north. Now those countries have the same religious beliefs we do. . . . Today we face a threat from the West, from the Popists and the Protestants.”

Nowhere has religion become more important in shaping identity than in the world of Islam, and the Islamic resurgence is a major development in our world. The people involved in this resurgence—which has been going on for twenty or twenty-five years now—by and large are people engaged in the process of modernization and urbanization in their societies. They tend to be upwardly mobile, first-generation urbanites with some form of higher education, either technical school or university. These people who are expressing their Muslim consciousness range from the female Turkish medical students a few years ago who were defying their government by wearing Islamic headscarves to class, to Mohammed Atta and his fellow highjacker. Both represent the type of people who are feeling this renewed commitment to Islam.

This Islamic resurgence, does, unfortunately, include extremist and violent elements, as we saw so tragically on September 11. The reactions of different societies to that attack on America were very much along cultural, civilizational lines. Britain and a few other countries have stood with us enthusiastically, while most Europeans have been more restrained, more qualified in their support. As for the Muslim world, while the war in Afghanistan was going on, it seemed that in every Muslim society, the populace was overwhelmingly on the side of Al Qaeda and against the United States. This is something we’re going to have to live with.

The third large change in the world situation followed the collapse of the Soviet Union. During the Cold War we had a clear bipolar situation: two superpowers, two rivals. What do we have now? Political scientists debate whether we have a unipolar or a multipolar situation. I think we can best describe the existing structure of global power as uni-multi-polar: one superpower, then six or eight major regional powers, then secondary regional powers, and then the rest. The structure of global power is pyramid-shaped, with the single superpower at the top. The superpower has veto action on almost any big, global issue.

In that second tier of major regional powers I would put France and Germany, acting through the European Union, plus Russia, China, Indonesia, India, Iran, Brazil, and South Africa. The third tier, the secondary regional powers, is more complicated. It would include the UK, Poland, Japan, Australia, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Argentina, and Nigeria. Although the superpower pretty much has to be involved in any major international issue, it cannot act alone in resolving such issues. It has to get cooperation of some other major power, a lesson that the Bush administration has been learning since September 11.

This structure of global power also defines the lines of conflict. One natural line of conflict is between the superpower and the major regional powers. The United States is involved everywhere and wants to be involved everywhere, wants to shape developments all over the world. The major regional power, whether it’s the European Union or Iran or China or India, usually thinks it ought to shape what goes on in its own region. Hence there is a natural basis for conflict between the superpower and the major regional power, which in the past decade has manifested itself in a variety of ways. But then there’s also a second level of conflict: between the major regional power that wants to dominate its region and the secondary regional powers that don’t want to be dominated. We’re not necessarily talking about violent conflict here but about antagonism and conflicts of interest. These two lines of conflict generate a rather natural basis for cooperation after all between the superpower and the secondary regional powers in opposition to the major regional powers.

“While the war in Afghanistan was going on, it seemed that in every Muslim society the populace was overwhelmingly on the side of Al Qaeda and against the United States.”

“There is a natural basis for conflict between the superpower and the major regional power . . . and between the major regional power . . . and the secondary regional powers.”
During the last decade, relations between the United States and various secondary regional powers have by and large, not always, become much more cooperative. We’ve become great friends with Argentina, never a particularly good friend in the past. We have reinvigorated the alliance with Japan. And to counter Russia we have tried to develop a loose coalition of secondary powers along the Russian border in what is known as GUUAM—Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, and Moldova. The reason we were able to get into Uzbekistan so easily after September 11 was that for some time we’ve been cultivating Uzbekistan as a secondary power to counter Russia’s influence in central Asia.

The efforts by the Bush administration to build a coalition against terrorism are very important, because the countries it is trying to get in that coalition are precisely the major regional powers with which we have been having difficult relations at times because of a natural conflict of interest. I think the Administration deserves credit for handling this so well—for getting Russia to cooperate, and having some forms of cooperation with China, and even Iran, in addition to the cooperation of the Europeans.

How long will the September 11 impact last? My guess is, probably not all that long. The war in Afghanistan became a conflict over who controls Afghanistan. We’re trying to thwart Iran’s efforts to extend its influence over Afghanistan, which seems to me to be a very natural development—we as the superpower want to shape what goes on there, and so does the neighboring major regional power, Iran. The more stimulating question is, how long will cooperation with Russia last? It’s hard to believe that the Russians will be happy with our establishing a permanent U.S. military presence in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. Although they seemed agreeable to our presence there after September 11, I would doubt very much that this welcome will continue for a long time—unless the Russians begin to feel that they can’t by themselves contain the threat from Islamic fundamentalism in their part of the world. Every region has its own terrorist threat. But we seem also to be facing a global terrorist threat, and there’s overlap but not identity between the global and the local threats.

The fourth significant change in global politics since the Cold War concerns the nature of international conflict. One rather striking thing over the past several decades has been the relative scarcity of interstate wars. One analy-
in far more of these activities than people of other religions. One of the things that attracted a lot of attention in The Clash of Civilizations was my use of the phrase “the bloody borders of Islam.” But if you look around the Muslim world you see that in the 1990s Muslims were fighting non-Muslims in Bosnia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Chechnya, Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, Kashmir, Indonesia, the Philippines, the Middle East, Sudan, Nigeria, and other places. Muslims have been fighting one another also. The International Institute for Strategic Studies surveyed the armed conflicts going on in the world in 2000, and its figures show that twenty-three of the thirty-two conflicts under way involved Muslims.

Why is this? I don’t think it has much to do with the Koran or any other traditional religious teaching. I think it is largely a response to unsuccessful modernization in most Muslim societies, a product of the absence of pluralism and liberty and open politics in those societies. It is also a product of historic resentment, particularly among Arabs, over what they feel have been great injustices imposed on them by the West. And it is also, I think, a result of the division within Islam. Every other major civilization has a core state. What is a core state for Muslims? Who provides leadership to Islam? The division within Islam reminds me of Henry Kissinger’s comment about his frustrations in dealing with Europe when he was Secretary of State: “When I want to speak to Europe, whom do I call?”

When you want to speak to Islam, whom do you call? Cairo? Tehran? Riyadh? Ankara? Islamabad? Jakarta? This division contributes to the degree to which Muslims fight one another, and the competition among states like Saudi Arabia and Iran to gain influence within Islam leads them to provide support to Islamic groups that are fighting non-Muslims, as they have done from Bosnia to the Philippines.

When is this likely to change? I fear that my conclusion is: not very soon. A demographic analysis in my book shows the proportion of the population in the 15-to-24 age group in various countries. Now there have been notable changes in some countries; in the Balkans, for instance, the proportion is going down significantly. But in other Muslim countries, including Saudi Arabia, the youth sector is expanding. This is a great source of instability, a great source of recruits for guerrilla and terrorist organizations, and a great source of migrants to other countries. The proportion of Muslim youth in the world’s population will continue to grow.

In the longer run, twenty years from now or so, the youth sector will probably be declining, and that will contribute to stability in the Muslim world. But it will also be necessary for Muslim countries to develop more efficient, effective means of modernization, and to open their societies to competitive and pluralistic enterprises.

**DISCUSSION**

**Michael Cromartie:** Thank you, Sam. Now everyone else is invited to join in. [All participants will be identified at the end.] David?

**David Brooks:** Dr. Huntington, you began by saying that since the decline of the Cold War ideological fights have become less important and cultural fights have become more important. A number of people have talked about the Al Qaeda forces and the Islamists as “Islamo-fascists.” I think they mean half Islamic and half fascist, meaning half religious and half ideological. The implication is that Al Qaeda’s attack on the United States was an attack on the ideology that America represents. America represents pluralism, individual choice; we all have multiple identities; America is an economic civilization that measures itself by economic growth; we all believe in social mobility, and of course democracy. Therefore America represents an ideological threat to Al Qaeda and similar groups. What does it mean, in policy terms, that what we’re facing here is at least half an ideological fight?

**Samuel Huntington:** It seems to me that the cultural/religious element is overwhelmingly preponderant. After all, Osama Bin Laden and likeminded people have denounced Western civilization. Sure, they denounced particular aspects of that civilization, claiming that we are corrupt, decadent, and so on. But I don’t see much in the way of ideological content there, if you are thinking of ideology in political terms. I may be missing something, but militant Islam doesn’t seem to have much in the way of a political ideology. It certainly does have a religious commitment. “Militant Islam” seems to me to be the right phrase. There are, of course, sort of secular versions of militant Islam. I don’t think anybody would make a big case for the religiosity of Saddam Hussein. Nor does he have any political ideology to speak of.

**Jay Tolson:** I’m wondering how we even begin to take religion seriously as a political force. I think we’ve been
conditioned to talk about religion as an epiphenomenon, as something explicable in terms of political, economic, and social arrangements. We don’t really understand the historical conditions. We don’t see how uniquely we are products of things like the Scottish Enlightenment, which allowed us to separate ideologies from religions, values from economic pursuits, or to explain them in terms of economic arrangements. It was a long historical process. Now suddenly we’re encountering this culture that has not had that tradition of separation. Whether because of economic conditions or cultural traditions or moral crises, people in this part of the world do not feel that the solutions we worked out in the West—about the relationship between ultimate values and economic and political arrangements—work for them. We’re quick to say, these people are fascists or totalitarians; I have said so myself. But what is it about the religious values that is driving the situation?

Samuel Huntington: Are you talking just about Islam?

Jay Tolson: Let me put it this way. I think there is a problem when you say we’re in a civilizational conflict. What is it inside this “other civilization” that makes it so hard for us to negotiate, to work things out? Do we even have any kind of language of discussion?

Samuel Huntington: What I was really talking about was militant Islam. There are moderate Muslims. And, obviously, there are many governments that are interested only in maintaining their own power. When you are dealing with the militants, the chances that you can sit down and have a rational discussion with them, that you can work things out through compromise, are very small. We have had a very weak improvement in relations with Iran since September 11; nothing is frozen in stone forever. Iran is clearly a deeply split society at the moment. The triumph of the moderates over the extremists would be required for reasonable dialogue.

Samuel Huntington: It needs to be debated among Muslims. I don’t think we’re going to get anywhere trying to debate Islam with them.

Jay Tolson: Why not?

Samuel Huntington: Because they’ll view that as more of our imperialism and arrogance!

Roy Mottahedeh: We should not try to tell the Muslims what type of Islam is best for them.

Jay Tolson: No, but can’t we ask: What do you mean by your creed? What are the implications of your belief? What social system do you see arising out of your religious principles? I mean, take the doctrine seriously.

Kenneth Woodward: I’d like to know, Sam, whether you agree with the argument that this is not a clash of civilizations but an intracivilizational problem within Muslim societies. That is to say, Bin Laden is a product of his reaction to the government of Saudi Arabia, to the failure of Islamist parties in Egypt and Algeria and elsewhere; the United States is a secondary target.

Samuel Huntington: Undoubtedly it is an oversimplification to talk in terms of simply militant Islam and moderate Islam, but that kind of difference exists, and you can put individuals and groups and governments at various places on a continuum. To some extent, the attacks on the United States may be a displacement of attacks on the government of Saudi Arabia by Osama Bin Laden.

It does seem to me that on at least two occasions we missed the opportunity to try to develop the moderate forces in Islam. Eight years ago, when the Algerian military canceled the election that the Islamist party was clearly going to win, did they hear any complaint from us? Or the French? Or other Europeans? Not at all. We all sort of quietly said, “Well done, well done.” That produced a disaster in Algeria, a civil war in which 100,000 people have been killed. What would have happened if the FIS (Islamic Salvation Front) had come to power? The argument was, well, they’ll abolish democracy. My feeling at the time was, yeah, that’s a possibility, but (1) there will still be the military there who can throw them out, just as the Chilean military seized power when the socialist government in Chile became so extreme; (2) any kind of Algerian government is going to have to maintain decent relations with the West; and (3) if you allow the people to come to power through elections, that gives them status and power within the Islamist movement. By canceling the election, the Algerian military greatly strengthened the power of the extremists and the radicals in the Islamist movement. If we believe in democracy, then we ought to believe in a democracy that will allow Islamist parties to come to power.

The second botched opportunity was with Turkey. We shouldn’t approve of the Turkish military throwing out a democratically constituted
government led by an Islamist party, and the continuing delegitimization of that party and threatening of its leader. That’s not the way we should behave. If Islamists can come to power democratically, we need to try to work with them.

**Jeffrey Goldberg:** I wanted to ask a specific question about Pakistan and also a more general question about the reception you’ve received in the Muslim world. I’ll preface it by saying that about a year and a half ago I was interviewing General Musharraf in Rawalpindi, Pakistan, and I guess he paid you the highest compliment you can pay an academic. We were talking about *The Clash of Civilizations,* and he said, “Well, you know, this is all Sam Huntington’s fault. Before this book, no one ever talked about Islam and Christianity in competition. So it really all goes back to Samuel Huntington!”

Musharraf seems to be doing quite a remarkable thing right now—he seems to be making a huge correction in the course of his society. I wonder if you think that can work, if you believe it represents more than simply one man trying to move his country. Also, have you heard any positive feedback about your ideas in the Muslim world?

**Samuel Huntington:** In regard to Musharraf and Pakistan, I plead ignorance. I think Musharraf has done a tremendous job so far. Obviously he has a very difficult balancing act. I don’t have great hope for the future of Pakistan, which is a terribly divided country. Its leaders have been notoriously corrupt. But maybe Musharraf can do something. Back in the late 1950s and early ’60s, General Ayyub Khan did a reasonably good job, as I recall, governing his country and promoting economic development. But once that regime ended, Pakistan began to go downhill.

On the other question, the reaction of Muslim countries to my ideas, all I can say is that there certainly has been interest in them. I don’t think I’ve had a huge sale in Muslim countries, but the book has been translated into Arabic, Indonesian, and other languages. Unfortunately, some of the more extremist people in the Muslim countries seem to endorse the clash-of-civilizations idea. Undoubtedly, Musharraf has been responding to them.

This relates to a more general criticism, I guess, of my argument. People say that it’s a self-fulfilling prophecy. That’s nonsense; no prophecy or forecast is inherently self-fulfilling. It depends on how people react to it. I said in my book, look, there’s a real possibility of local conflict between groups of different civilizations, and there’s a possibility that these local conflicts can escalate into much broader sorts of conflicts. There has been some movement in that direction in the wars of Yugoslavia and elsewhere. But it all depends on how people react. Back in the late 1950s and early ’60s, all sorts of extremely well-informed, intelligent people were saying that a nuclear war between the United States and the Soviet Union was virtually inevitable. Well, that didn’t happen, in part because people took the prediction seriously. They established hotlines between the Pentagon and the Kremlin, engaged in arms-control negotiations, developed informal understandings between the United States and Soviet Union of just what the rules of the game were.

I’m very pleased that what I said about the “clash of civilizations” stimulated a lot of talk, maybe some action, about dialogue between civilizations. I’ve been invited to conferences after conferences involving people from different civilizations to try to promote a dialogue between them. The government of Iran sponsored a resolution in the U.N. General Assembly declaring 2001 “the year for dialogue between civilizations.” I think that’s great! That’s the sort of thinking I would like to encourage. This is what we’re trying to do at my research institute at Harvard.

**Alan Cooperman:** Professor Huntington, your remarks were almost entirely descriptive. There were only a few normative implications.

**Samuel Huntington:** I stay away from those. I’m a social scientist.

**Alan Cooperman:** Still, I think it’s not inappropriate to bring up the normative questions that your last remarks were leading to. I’d like to ask a rhetorical question, and I’ll answer it, and then it will lead to a real question. The rhetorical question is: What’s so bad about a clash of civilizations? After all, the spirit of liberty is the spirit of not being too sure of ourselves. We ought not to fear competition in the realm of ideas or cultures. The answer to that rhetorical question is, I think, fairly obvious, that the clash of cultures or ideologies has led to bloodshed and many other things we don’t like to see. The question I want to ask is: What do you see as rules of the road that might be able to turn the clash of civilizations into something that is good for us all?

**Samuel Huntington:** I’m aware that there’s an inherent ambiguity in the term “clash of civilizations.” Are we talking about simply differing views, different types of cultures and customs, different religions? Or are we talking about violent conflict? What we want to aim for is to prevent these differences in culture and civilization from leading to violent conflict. In the conclusion of my book I suggest some ways in which we might move in that direction.

In particular, I suggest that, unless there are truly vital national interests...
at stake, countries in one civilization should try to avoid getting involved in conflict involving countries from other civilizations. Exercise restraint. Don’t go poking into conflict elsewhere unless vital national interests are at stake (as they were, I would say, when we entered the Gulf War). In addition, I think the core countries in major civilizations have a responsibility to try to contain and end local conflict involving countries from their civilization. That has happened in some cases, and in other cases it hasn’t. This gets us back to the problem in the Muslim world I mentioned earlier: there isn’t a core country or state, so whom do you look to? If there’s a conflict between a Muslim population and an Orthodox population, whom do you try to negotiate with?

We should try to identify the common elements in the world’s major civilizations. I don’t think we are going to have a universal civilization, and I don’t think the world is going to be Westernized in any meaningful sense; a lot of what we’ve been talking about is reaction against Westernization. But in most of the world’s major civilizations, the various countries share common elements. We should identify and emphasize these things.

Peter Brown: One thing you didn’t mention when you talked about culture is the role of women. And I’m not talking in terms of human rights—I’m talking about societal economic assets. Given at least the popular perception of the role of women in the Islamic world, and given the relatively low socioeconomic development there, perhaps those things are linked. Many think they are. If capitalist states like the United States want to open up relations, how can they do this? We can’t offer them membership in the World Trade Organization—they’re not anywhere near that level. Is there an economic way to deal with the Islamic world?

Samuel Huntington: Again, the Islamic world varies so. When you say “the role of women”—well, after all, several Muslim countries have had women as prime ministers. Women’s participation in the labor force obviously varies a great deal from one Muslim country to another. I think perhaps we need to distinguish among different cultures within Islam. In terms of economic development, the southeast Asian Muslim countries (Malaysia and Indonesia) have done reasonably well. The Arab countries, by and large, have not. Turkey has done reasonably well. There’s great variety. Certainly trying to open up the economies—which of course means trying to reduce state control of the economy—is going to be very, very difficult.

Peter Brown: Do they have any kind of educational infrastructure that would allow them to compete in the global economy?

Samuel Huntington: Freedom House—or maybe it was some other group—recently put out a report showing that illiteracy in Arab countries is extraordinarily high. Without a big improvement in their literacy rate, economic progress will be very difficult.

David Bloom: You said that you thought the September 11 impact would not last long. What is your basis for saying that? Also, you spoke of missed opportunities to develop moderate Islamic forces. What would your prescription be for the United States now in countries like Saudi Arabia or Egypt—do we allow Islamists to come to power there if they can?

Samuel Huntington: I don’t think we have to worry about the possibility of Islamists coming to power through elections in either Egypt or Saudi Arabia. It would be nice if we did have to worry about that! Unfortunately, when there are dictatorial regimes, as in those two countries, the moderates get squeezed out, and you're left with only a radical opposition. That puts us in the difficult position of saying, well, any alternative could be worse, so let’s collaborate with the existing government.

As for the impact of September 11: I don’t know whether you mean the impact in the United States or more generally in global politics. In global politics, each of the countries within the coalition has its own priorities that it is concerned about. We are concerned about a global terrorist network. If we reduce Al Qaeda and its associated cells to a point where they are not able to inflict further damage on us, or at least not more than relatively minor damage—and that may be a rather lengthy undertaking—then we’re not going to be terribly concerned about other local groups, some of which may be linked one way or another with Al Qaeda. After all, up until September 11 we were criticizing the Russians for their treatment of the Chechens, and we were expressing some concern about the Chinese and the Uigers. Each country has a particular group of terrorists or militants it’s concerned about. I just doubt very much that there is sufficient common interest—the glue—to hold the coalition together for a long period of time.

Undoubtedly, it could have lasting impact that we have had this cooperation with the Russians. That is a good thing, and may help us in dealing with the Russians on other issues.

David Bloom: What opportunities are we missing now with moderate Muslims?

Samuel Huntington: Where are the moderate Muslims? It’s hard to identify them. If you look around the Muslim world, you don’t find large groups of moderates opposing authoritarian regimes.
Franklin Foer: It is probably premature to attempt some sort of ultimate judgment on the U.S. military action in Afghanistan, but it does seem as though the initial returns with regard to militant Islam are quite promising. The so-called Arab street isn’t smashing KFCs anymore, as far as I can tell. There is going to be a secular government in Afghanistan; Kuwait seems to be reversing its turn toward Islamism; Musharraf is getting serious about dealing with Pakistan’s Islamic militants; even Hamas chilled out for a little bit. My question is: Has the U.S. military action in Afghanistan affected your faith in the ability of our military power to rectify the situation? Are you any less worried about our military actions abroad exacerbating the clash of civilizations?

Samuel Huntington: The war in Afghanistan has been a great success for the U.S. military so far, and that has tuned down the vociferousness of the support of Muslim peoples elsewhere for Al Qaeda and the Taliban. Nobody wants to get on the bandwagon of a loser. When it looked as if Al Qaeda could give us a good fight, they all lined up on that side. Now that Al Qaeda has lost, they are keeping quiet. It seems to me that those sentiments are still there, however, and are very likely to manifest themselves again if some other major conflict develops between the United States and an Islamic group.

Judith Shulevitz: I want to revisit a question we’ve already touched on, the distinction between religion and ideology. When you say, “the conflict is no longer between communism and capitalism; it’s now between Islam and the West,” you see a whole new configuration of states. A lot of realigning is obvious there. But I’m not entirely clear what we gain in understanding when we say that we’ve gone from clashes of ideology to clashes of religion. Do we learn something about the nature of the conflict? You seemed to imply as much when you said that the rise of religious conflict seems to bring a rise in the degree of violence, particularly in religious terrorism involved in Muslim conflict. You posited a number of reasons why this might be the case: a response to unsuccessful modernization, a response to lack of plurality, lack of openness in those societies, and so on. Those explanations themselves seem to beg the question of the distinction between ideology and religion.

Maybe Jay Tolson was onto something when he said that the distinction between religion and ideology might be our distinction, not necessarily relevant to a society that has not gone through the same kind of enlightenment, has not worked through the Scottish thinkers in the same way, and so on. My question is, then: In terms of thinking about conflict, what do we learn when we shift from an ideological model to a religious model?

Samuel Huntington: I think you’re really asking two questions: What is the distinction between ideology and religion? And what do we learn by defining conflict in terms of religion rather than ideology? It seems to me that religion involves a form of belief in something transcendent, some sort of a god, whereas ideology is a secular set of beliefs. Obviously, there are similarities between the two. Ideologies that have played a role in the world’s history in the past couple of centuries were all products of Western civilization, whereas no major religion has been a product of Western civilization. You may detect some uncertainty in my voice when I say that; somebody may come up with an exception. But certainly most of the world’s great religions came from elsewhere.

For a couple of hundred years now, at least since the French Revolution, in the West we have been talking about political ideologies. In conflicts between political ideologies, all of which stem in one way or another from Western civilization, there is a certain commonality. I spent a large portion of my youth debating Marxists. I could debate with them because we had some things in common. I doubt that I could have much of a useful debate with extreme Islamists. We’re in different worlds. In that sense, it seems to me that there is a distinction. I’m not arguing that there’s a fundamental difference between religious conflicts and ideological conflicts; in both, people fight each other and kill each other. The lines of conflict today, however, are very different from what they were during most of the twentieth century.

Nina Easton: One word that has not come up in this discussion is “oil”—and the U.S. role in supporting a repressive fundamentalist regime, like Saudi Arabia, because of this important resource. Will you comment on this, Professor Huntington?

Samuel Huntington: The Wahhabite tradition, which is the tradition we’re dealing with here, is extremely fanatic. Both the Saudi government and Al Qaeda are devoted to this tradition of Islam. Of course, Bin Laden believes that the Saudi government deserted the true faith, but Saudi Arabia has been promoting Wahhabism and organizing schools and mosques throughout the Muslim world that teach it. This is a large part of the problem. I don’t know what proportion of Muslims is committed to that particular extreme form of Islam—my guess is that it’s pretty small—but the Saudi government certainly has been propagating it. This is one of the reasons why our relations with Saudi Arabia are so ambivalent. And the second reason, of course, is oil. We continue to get a lot of oil from that part of the world; it undoubtedly makes us very
hesitant to do something that might destabilize the Saudi government.

The subject of oil brings up another important point about these countries, the so-called resource curse. Countries that are rich in natural resources like oil don’t have the incentive to promote economic development. They become dependent on those resources, which almost always are controlled by the state. There’s no incentive for people to become private entrepreneurs. So you get these state bureaucracies that hinder economic development. There are some partial exceptions to that pattern in some oil-rich countries, but none, really, among the Arab countries. Indonesia is one of the partial exceptions; it had significant economic growth in the ’60s, ’70s, and ’80s.

Nina Easton: May I follow up with an economic question? Libertarians make the argument that we really don’t need troops in the area to protect the oil, that there’s always going to be a market for it and an interest in selling it. What do you think of that argument?

Samuel Huntington: Well, sure, the oil isn’t of much use unless they sell it. The question would be, on what terms? The dramatic oil price increases back in the 1970s had tremendously deleterious effects on the U.S. economy and on the world economy. A couple of countries collaborating to manipulate oil prices and supply could have very adverse effects. It seems to me that it’s in the U.S. national interest first to reduce our dependence on oil and then to diversify the sources. This is one of the reasons, certainly, why our government has been encouraging American oil companies to take an interest in developing the resources in the Caspian area. In the long run, however, Caspian oil reserves are apparently only a small fraction of those in the Persian Gulf. Something like 80 percent of the world’s oil reserves are in the Gulf area.

John Leo: Two questions. First, if religion is the principal defining characteristic of a civilization, what difference does it make that Western civilization seems to be shedding its religion? Nobody goes to church anymore in Europe. Although there’s religious energy in the Americas, our elites have long since shed it; increasingly they look at religion not just with indifference but as something positively toxic. What difference does that make? My second question is this: How bleak is your assessment of the West’s situation in light of terrorism? The fact that we can be taken apart by a few people with a few dollars, that the actions of these fanatics can impose an enormous economic cost, that no restraining voices are being raised in the Muslim world against them, that the population there is burgeoning—do you think we are in very great danger now?

Samuel Huntington: On your first question, about the decline of religion in the West: First of all, there’s a big difference between the United States and Europe in this regard. Religion as any sort of significant social or public force has certainly virtually disappeared in Western Europe. Religious revivals have taken place in many parts of the world in recent decades, but the one place in which revival has not occurred is Western Europe. The United States has always been an extremely religious country. This has been remarked upon by many European visitors, not only Tocqueville but also people before him and lots after him. Somebody did an interesting study a few years ago, taking an index of polling data of people who had religious beliefs and engaged in religious practices. He found a direct correlation in twenty-five countries between the level of economic development and the decline of religious-
sive strategy by getting additional mechanisms and procedures in place, but that’s never going to be anything like 100 percent or even 50 percent certain. It seems to me what we have to pursue is an offensive strategy against terror and its supporters. We have to try to eliminate them. That’s the most effective way.

Jeffery Sheler: How do you differentiate between the kind of clash we are seeing between Islam and the West and the clash that we’ve known about for some time in our own society: conservative Protestantism and conservative Catholicism versus secularism, the fact that so many religious people feel antagonized by what they perceive to be a hostile culture. The cultural clash basically embodies a critique, not of our entire system, perhaps, but certainly of the secular nature of our society. Are we talking about matters of degree here? In this country we generally don’t settle our battles with bullets—although some people do. To what extent is the conflict that you are writing and talking about that. The nineteenth century, particularly after the Irish immigration of the 1840s and 1850s, saw a fascinating process in the adaptation of Catholics—Irish Catholics, in particular—to this fundamentally Protestant culture that they moved into. By the first part of the twentieth century, the Catholics in America had been very substantially Americanized, and they boasted about that. Being Americanized, really, means adapting to a culture that was a product of Protestants. Ron Englehart, a professor at the University of Michigan, runs the World Values Survey, which does extensive public-opinion surveys in over sixty countries. They look at the strength of national culture, among other things, and in particular at the distribution of attitudes on values. One thing they found was that Catholics in the Netherlands have values much more similar to the values of Protestants in the Netherlands than to those of Catholics in neighboring Belgium. In other words, religious groups adapt to the national culture.

Jeffery Sheler: In the days after September 11 we heard Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson basically agreeing that we are a secular country, that God has removed his hand of protection, and so on. Of course, most major religious voices in this country repudiated that, but only because of the timing and perhaps because of the naming of particular groups as examples of this secularism. The substance of the argument, that the United States has lost its spiritual moorings and has become a secular nation, is a view that’s shared by many conservative Christians.

Samuel Huntington: I don’t know of any evidence to support that. According to various studies, religious practice in the United States has seen no significant decline, with one exception. The one significant decline in church attendance over the last fifty years was among Catholics.

Hillel Fradkin: Sam, I was wondering what you think about the role of individual political leaders in the Muslim world. You have described these large trends in civilizational groups, but at the political level, individual leaders can sometimes make a big difference. Someone like Musharraf could play a significant role in the way this conflict is perceived, at least in the short term, maybe in the long term. Apart from what Musharraf has done since September 11, he gave an important speech several months earlier, in June 2001, that showed he had been thinking about what militant Islam represented in Pakistan. So one question is: Within this large civilizational scheme, what role do you think individual political leaders can play? And a second: In view of your experience in government, how would you assess our record as a country in helping other countries solve their social problems?

Samuel Huntington: Individual leaders can indeed play a tremendously important role, sometimes even in authoritarian regimes. President Musharraf may be able to do something in Pakistan. I previously mentioned General Ayyub Khan, who did a good job of running Pakistan in the early 1960s. Certainly, any sort of fundamental change in a country comes—with a few exceptions, like a major revolution—from the top down.
It has to come from people who are part of the establishment. In an earlier book called *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*, I looked at some thirty cases of transitions from authoritarian regimes to democratic regimes between 1974 and 1990. Overwhelmingly, those transitions got their start when some groups within the authoritarian regime decided, for one set of reasons or another, Well, we'd better liberalize, better open up. There typically was a conflict between the democratizers or the moderates, on the one hand, and the stand-patters. The moderates in the regime went out and found moderates in the opposition with whom they could deal. That was the pattern, it seems to me, in a large proportion of the cases.

If there’s going to be a change in dictatorial regimes in the Muslim world, or for that matter, political change in China, it’s probably going to have to come from within. I don’t sense a significant opposition within the Saudi government or the Egyptian government, a significant element that wants to bring about democracy in those societies. Certainly, we can do things to try to encourage those governments to liberalize, but I guess I would tend to be more optimistic about that sort of political opening occurring in China than in many of the Muslim dictatorships. China is developing; its people are entrepreneurial, intensely involved in the global economy; and the Chinese Communist party now is welcoming entrepreneurs and businessmen as party members. The country has the makings of an elite that will be favorably disposed toward political opening.

**Hillel Fradkin:** If something like that, a democratic movement, were to happen in an important, powerful Muslim country—say Pakistan, which is the only Muslim country with nuclear weapons and has prestige as a result of that—what impact would it have on what you described as the underlying civilizational fault lines? Would it really have much effect at all? Or would there just be a moderation in international politics?

**Samuel Huntington:** One can’t assume that a political opening or democratization is going to lead to a lessening of international tensions and conflict. One of the most popular theories in political science and international relations recently has been the so-called democratic peace hypothesis, the theory that democratic countries don’t go to war against one another. Empirically speaking, that’s pretty much true, although we can argue about it in a few marginal cases. This is certainly one of the reasons why President Clinton was pushing democratization, because he saw a connection between promoting democracy and promoting peace.

There is, however, the problem (which has been pointed out in an analysis by Professor Jack Snyder of Columbia) that while the democratic peace hypothesis may be generally true, the historical record shows that democratizing regimes—regimes in transition—are more likely to be involved in wars than either stable autocratic regimes or stable democratic regimes. There’s a certain logic to that: if a regime is transitionally democratized, the political leaders have to appeal to popular sentiments, and these are often nationalistic appeals. It becomes difficult for the emerging political leaders who aren’t sure of their power to make compromises on tough issues in negotiations with foreign powers, where an established authoritarian government wouldn’t do that, and an established democratic government with a secure majority in parliament is better able to do that. In the transitional phase, it’s difficult for leaders to accommodate. I think the chances of political opening in China are reasonably good, but that could lead to much more difficult relations with the United States by making it harder for this emerging leadership to compromise on Taiwan or on other issues.

**David Brooks:** Do you think some civilizations are condemned to live under authoritarianism or dictatorship or some other undemocratic form of government? I ask that because some say there are really two Huntingtons out there: there’s the happy Huntington of the earlier democratization book and the pessimistic Huntington who paints a world in which people are condemned to live within certain civilizational structures.

**Samuel Huntington:** I don’t think there is any inconsistency between the arguments of those two books. *Clash of Civilizations* deals with international relations, with the sources of conflict in global politics. The other book dealt with transitions to democracy and was trying to explain why this happened. Why did we have this mass shift in regimes in merely ten to fifteen years? And how stable are these regimes? In that book on democratization, I discuss the issue you just raised: are there some cultures inherently unfavorable to democracy? I think you could say that some cultures are more favorable, some less favorable, but I don’t think there’s any major culture where it would be impossible for democracy to take root.

Historically there are very good reasons for democratization in the Western world. It grew essentially out of the Protestant Reformation, and until just a few decades ago, social scientists would have said that Catholic countries can’t become democratic: Catholicism is a hierarchical religion, with authority from the Pope, and Catholics are naturally authoritarian. About sixty or seventy years ago, the democratic countries...
in the world were almost entirely Protestant countries. But Catholicism changed in the Second Vatican Council, and in what I call the third wave of democratization, in the ‘70s and ‘80s, the Catholic Church was one of the major forces bringing about democratization in a lot of countries.

Any great religion or culture has all sorts of diverse elements within it that can be capitalized on for a variety of purposes. Now people make the argument that Islam is incompatible with democracy or that Confucian culture is incompatible with democracy. I argue in my book that I don’t see any inherent conflict between Islamic culture and democracy. There is the problem that in an Islamic state there is only one community and it is both political and religious; hence you can’t have our ideal of separation of church and state. But it seems to me that there are ways of accommodating that within a democratic political system. If you look at the basic assumptions of the culture, Confucianism may be more incompatible with democracy, but again, I think that is something that can be dealt with. I don’t see that any particular culture is entirely incompatible with democracy—not necessarily Western, liberal democracy but democracy of some sort.

**Karen Tumulty:** It seems that economic sanctions against Iraq have done nothing against Saddam but starve the people. We seem to be caught in a cycle of fostering change by providing guns and air support. Is that how the United States should help countries democratize?

**Samuel Huntington:** In the project of encouraging movement in a democratic direction, we’ve already dealt with the easy cases. Initially they were in southern Europe, where the process started—Spain, Greece, and Portugal. Then democratization got going in Latin America, and in the Philippines, Korea, and Taiwan, and then of course in central Europe. But those were the easy cases for historical reasons, for cultural reasons, and because of this change in the attitude of the Catholic Church. Now we have the hard cases, mostly in the Muslim world and in East Asia. It’s going to be a lot harder to promote democracy there.

Also, there are countries where the United States doesn’t have a lot of leverage. We should have some leverage with Egypt, of course, since we have given them billions of dollars’ worth of aid. But it’s a very tricky business. There’s always the danger of stirring up some sort of negative reaction. In the past we have picked out particular leaders and tried to push them toward democracy; our record there is rather mixed.

As to the efficacy of economic sanctions: in many cases they haven’t been terribly effective. The one place where economic sanctions did seem to play a significant role in democratization was South Africa. There is a very good reason for that: white South Africans consider themselves a part of the European West. And when the United States and European countries isolated them, when they said, “We’re not going to let our sports teams play with yours, we’re going to cancel direct flights from Johannesburg to New York, we’re going to exclude you”—that hurt, because they thought they were part of that elite club called the West.

**Alan Cooperman:** I wanted to ask about offense and defense in the clash of civilizations. It strikes me that some of the hand-wringing on our side is odd, considering that we’ve been throwing our weight around in the clash of civilizations for a long time now, and especially in the last decade. I remember that after the fall of the Soviet Union, about 1992–93, as its economy was imploding, members of Congress pushed very hard to allow missionaries from the West into Russia and to try to prevent the Russian government from erecting barriers to that missionary activity. That was particularly grating for the Russian people. Large numbers of Mormons and other missionaries were flooding in. The impact of the United States and the West is felt in every corner of the world today—the national drink of Tajikistan is RC Cola. Is it irrelevant to ask: Who is on offense and who is on defense? And a somewhat more subtle question: Can the West moderate the ways in which we are on the offensive? Our political ideology seems to prevent us from reining in our religious output, our missionaries, our cultural output, such as Hollywood. We have no legal or economic mechanism to restrain ourselves.

**Samuel Huntington:** That’s quite a collection of issues that you poured out. Obviously, American culture is having a tremendous impact all over the world. That’s one result of globalization. Not always, but very often, globalization means Americanization in some sense, whether it’s Coca-Cola or American movies or American music or whatever. What you pointed to about missionary activity is another sign of the increased significance of religion in world affairs. As countries increasingly link their national identity with some sort of religious faith, other religions become challenging to that national identity and can even be viewed as subversive. Hence proselytizing for those religions, missionary activity, is subversive of the country, in the way that we thought Communist activities in the United States during the Cold War were subversive.

The whole issue of religious freedom is becoming tremendously important. This was manifested in 1998 when Congress passed the International Religious Freedom Act, a product of a rather bizarre combination...
of neoconservative Jews, fundamentalist Protestants, and traditional liberals. The Clinton administration opposed it, and it was watered down before it eventually went through.

I think that another manifestation of the connection between religion and international affairs is the competition between Islam and Christianity, historically the two great missionary religions. They are both out working the world trying to make converts. This competition is particularly acute in Africa, where Muslims have influence in the north and Christians in the south. I just got an advance copy of a forthcoming book dealing with the spread of Christianity in the world: The Next Christendom. The author, Philip Jenkins, makes the argument that there is a great spread of Christianity in the southern half of the world, and that the balance in the Catholic Church and in other denominations is shifting from the northern hemisphere to the southern hemisphere, particularly into Africa. This competition for converts is the religious dimension of the clash of civilizations.

Alan Cooperman: What would you respond to the second part of my question: Can we restrain the offensive aspects of the march of our civilization?

Samuel Huntington: I’m an unrestrained enthusiast for restraint. I would hope we could act in a more cautious, moderate way. But I think in our culture there is the assumption of universalism, the assumption that everyone else in the world is basically like us in terms of culture and values. If they are not like us, they want to become like us. And if they don’t want to become like us, then there is something wrong with them. They don’t understand their true interests, and we have to persuade or coerce them to want to become like us. That’s a most unfortunate set of assumptions on our part, and it underlies a lot of what we do.

We’re going to have to get used to living in a world where there are different cultures, different civilizations, different values and priorities. There may be some sort of convergence, but only over a very long period of time. I argue in my book that when countries begin to modernize, modernization and Westernization seem very closely linked, and the modernizing countries think they have to import all these things from the West in order to develop. In Japan, back in the 1870s, there was a big discussion of whether they should adopt English as a national language in order to modernize and develop. They decided not to, and they developed very nicely without having the benefits of the English language. But there’s this sort of assumption that the two have to go together.

As the process goes on, however, modernization and Westernization become separate. As countries modernize, they tend to find new virtues in their traditional values and culture, and they attribute to those traditional values their success at modernization.

Alan Cooperman: Do you think there is any way in which the restraint of which you are an unrestrained enthusiast can be effected as a matter of national policy rather than simply individual voluntary behavior?

Samuel Huntington: One of the good things about the Bush administration at the beginning was that they were thinking along these lines, making critical comments about such concepts as nation-building. That has changed now; obviously there are cases where you get dragged into playing a much more active role. But I hope they are not thinking about trying to change the culture of Afghanistan. The Taliban changed the culture of Afghanistan in a significant way, and now Afghanistan is reverting to normal. That’s something we’re going to have to live with.

Jeffrey Goldberg: How important is culture as an irritant to other civilizations, compared to politics? It seems that the main reason why Osama Bin Laden hates us is that there are American troops in Saudi Arabia. He hasn’t made any statements about RC Cola or Shrek poisoning the minds of Muslim youth. In Egypt, I interviewed a guy from the Egyptian Islamic Jihad in a Baskin Robbins. He didn’t see any contradiction between enjoying American fast food and hating Americans. If we convince Hollywood not to send offensive movies to the Muslim world, will that really change anything?

Samuel Huntington: I don’t think the spread of consumer products around the world has much impact at all on the way people behave. Drinking RC Cola or wearing American-style clothes has little to do with their values. In our family, we’ve owned nothing but Toyotas for thirty-odd years. That hasn’t made us think like Japanese. More of a case could be made, probably, for movies and TV and the Internet having an effect on values.

I took part in a project that Peter Berger organized (also supported by the Pew Foundation) to look at the effects of globalization on culture in nine countries. We asked social scientists in those countries: What does cultural globalization mean at the local level? How does it affect how people behave in their daily lives? We found all sorts of ways of maintaining cultural patterns. For instance, a businessman in India will be very Western in business but very traditional at home. Another thing we noticed was the extent to which cultural globalization isn’t limited to the spread of America’s values and culture. The impact of Japanese culture is apparent in much of East Asia. To
some extent China exports its culture, and the export of Indian culture is becoming important. One of the nine countries we studied was Hungary: the Hungarians have the residue of Communist/Soviet culture but have developed a central European culture along with the traditional Hungarian culture.

One thing I hear again and again from business executives is: “Globalization means localization.” To operate successfully in a foreign country, you have to adapt to the culture of that society. Successful global corporations learn that lesson and practice it.

One very interesting example of this phenomenon is described in a book published in 1997 by my colleague James Watson. The book is titled Golden Arches East, and Watson and his five contributors look at McDonald’s in Tokyo, Seoul, Beijing, Taipei, and Hong Kong. McDonald’s performs different social functions in these places. In one of the cities—I think it was Seoul—the big function of McDonald’s is babysitting. It’s clean and safe; take your children, give them some money to get their hamburgers, go off and do your shopping or go to the opera or whatever, then come back and pick them up. In our country McDonald’s stands for fast food, meaning your food is prepared fast and you are supposed to eat it fast and get out; but in one Asian country, McDonald’s is more equivalent to a café in Paris, the place where you go with your newspaper or book and stay for hours.

E. J. Dionne: On this notion of change, David Brooks has made the argument that we tend to become the opposite of what we’re fighting against. During the Cold War, it was godless Communism we were opposing, and “Under God” came into the Pledge of Allegiance under Eisenhower. We reacted against what we were opposing. In this case we might have a quite different reaction because we see ourselves opposing religious fundamentalism, opposing the oppression of women.

Samuel Huntington: It’s an interesting point. It would mean that the clash with fanatical Islam wouldn’t reinvigorate America’s Christian identity but rather would invigorate a secular identity in reaction to this Muslim one.

John Cochran: It seems that we get into trouble in the Islamic world sometimes for our high-minded practices and sometimes for our selfish practices, usually having to do with oil. You lived through one of our high-minded problems, with Carter: his sticking with the Shah, trying to help the Shah even when the Shah could no longer help us. That seemed to be the right thing to do. But we paid a high price, a price we’re still paying.

David Shribman: Professor Huntington, for most of us the long view is about a week, so I hope you will give us a slightly longer view. It’s true that among the main themes of history in the last hundred years or so are the struggle between freedom and authority and the struggle between economic development and privation, and if it’s also true as you suggested earlier that there’s no inherent conflict between Islam and the West, then, if you were able to stand at the year 2020 and look backward with what we might call 20/20 hindsight, is it possible that the September 11 crisis might have petered out, like highjackings to Cuba or the energy crisis might have petered out, like highjackings to Cuba or the energy crisis or inflation? In other words, is this part of a long wave that might go back to the sixteenth or even the seventh century? Or is it a short wave, and will we someday reminisce about those days in 2001 and 2002 when we were afraid to go to stadiums, and laugh about our reaction the way we laugh now about fallout shelters?

Samuel Huntington: Certainly if we go back to the origins of Islam in the seventh century, there has been a pattern in the relations between Muslims and non-Muslims of periods of conflict, periods of coexistence, periods of conflict. Historically, this has been
going back and forth—the initial spread of Islam, then the resurgence of Western Christianity and the Crusades, and the Ottomans coming in and besieging Vienna a couple of times, and then the Western erosion of the Ottoman empire and the rise of Western colonialism. What we’re seeing now from that perspective is a resurgence of Islam.

Does that mean there has to be violent conflict? Not necessarily. One of the somewhat hopeful signs in 2020 will be the declining of the youth bulge in most Muslim societies. Generally speaking, it is young males who are responsible for violence in all societies—not just Muslim ones—whether it’s criminal or political or religious. Now, some of the other problems may still exist in 2020. The disincentive for development created by the presence of oil in the Arab countries, and the need for shrinking the power of the state, will still be here, but again there are some hopeful signs.

Judith Shulevitz: I think we assume that because we make a clear distinction between politics and culture, other countries do so also. In the Islamic world—or really in any world other than our own—that distinction is not as clear. The example of American troops on Saudi territory is a good one. It’s not clear at all that for Osama Bin Laden national sovereignty is the major issue. His objection is to the presence of American troops on holy sites. That’s a cultural issue, not just a political one. It’s hard to make these clear distinctions when you go from one culture to another.

Jeffrey Goldberg: I think that what Bin Laden is offended by is the idea that American troops are propping up a regime that he hates. I think he’s a cynic and an opportunist, and so he’ll use the idea that there are infidels sitting near Mecca as an excuse to churn up a lot of street hostility. But I think that what motivates him is primarily political.

Alan Cooperman: Regardless of whether what most rankles Osama Bin Laden is Hollywood films or some aspect of the U.S. presence or something else, it’s clear that he, and many, many others in the Middle East, feel under attack.

Jeffrey Goldberg: What do we do about that? Do we make a law that Hollywood can’t export movies? Do we negate who we are? Do we decide not to engage the world with our own ideas and our own culture?

Alan Cooperman: I think that a certain messianism is implicit in our idea that we need to protect not only ourselves but also representative democracy, and capitalism, and globalization, and if people in other cultures don’t want this package of things, that’s only because they don’t know enough, or are uneducated, or have a false consciousness. They should want it and they will want it, and ultimately they’ll thank us for it.

Jeffrey Goldberg: One theory about Bin Laden is that what he’s fighting against is the Westernization of his extended family, and that all this is a reaction to what he sees as the corruption—the Westernization—of his own family. It seems to me that most people in the Muslim world can find a path that combines Western influences and their own religion, and that Osama Bin Laden is part of an extreme minority who want to cleanse the culture entirely. I don’t think he has a wide base of support for that kind of war.

Alan Cooperman: In my experience in the Middle East, in particular, I have found an overwhelming sense of onslaught from the West. People have a pervasive sense that their cultures, societies, religions, are all under threat. The United States today feels very vulnerable, but we ought to realize that most of the world feels that we are the ones on the offensive and that they are vulnerable.

Hillel Fradkin: In regard to Westernization, it seems to me that the most crucial point for the Muslim world is the difference in views of gender relations and family relations. It’s the transformation in Muslim society that would have to take place to accommodate Westernization or Americanization: changes between husbands and wives, between fathers and daughters. That’s a much bigger change than letting your kids eat at McDonald’s and see Hollywood movies.

Jeffrey Goldberg: In a couple of my talks with Islamic scholars, I’ve found that what they most fear about America is nursing homes. They fear the export of the nursing home to Muslim societies. They find it astonishing and horrifying that we put old people away and hide them from the rest of the family.

David Bloom: Professor Huntington, if you are an advocate of restraint, but you don’t think it’s the export of movies or McDonald’s that needs to be restrained, then what should we be restraining?

Samuel Huntington: I argued in my book for restraint of our military involvement in conflicts elsewhere in the world, unless they involve really vital national interests. I don’t think we can or should restrain the activities of American multinational corporations in the world. But I also think that corporations are becoming more and more sensitive to the problems of culture in global society.

Restrains on the export of American culture? There’s nothing we can do in any formal way, but if American culture is going to be welcomed
abroad, the purveyors will have to be more sensitive to the local culture. The Harvard Academy had a research project with reports by social scientists in all the major countries and cultural regions of the world. What did they see as trends in the attitudes of the political and intellectual elites of their societies toward globalization? What did their elites see as threats to their society? One of the shocking things they reported was that the elites in their countries saw the United States as the greatest threat to their society. Russians, Chinese, Indians, Muslims—all generally saw the United States as the biggest threat. They didn’t mean military threat. What they meant was best captured by an Indian representative: “We feel the United States is continually trying to dictate our behavior, restraining our choices, trying to impose its values on us, limiting our freedom of action in a variety of ways, and we feel there’s nothing much we can do about this.” I don’t think we can shrink from our responsibilities, and I don’t think we should weaken ourselves. But the fear this Indian expressed is a feeling we have to be very sensitive to as we engage with people in other societies.

**DISCUSSION PARTICIPANTS**


---

**THE CENTER AND “CONVERSATIONS”**

The Ethics and Public Policy Center was established in 1976 to clarify and reinforce the bond between the Judeo-Christian moral tradition and the public debate over domestic and foreign policy issues. Its program includes research, writing, publication, and conferences. The Center affirms the political relevance of the great Western ethical imperatives—respect for the dignity of every person, individual freedom and responsibility, justice, the rule of law, and limited government. It maintains that moral reasoning is an essential complement to empirical calculation in the shaping of public policy. “Center Conversations,” edited by senior editor Carol Griffith, are based on conferences and seminars related to various Center projects. They cost $3 per copy (postage included). Previous titles include:

6. Conflict on Campus: Religious Liberty vs. Gay Rights?
   D. French, P. Logue, S. Macedo, C. Feldblum, W. Galston

7. New Century, New Story-Line: Catholics in America
   George Weigel and Kenneth Woodward

8. Can the Jews Survive America?
   Jack Wertheimer and David Brooks

9. Does God Belong on the Stump?
   Stephen Carter, Charles Krauthammer, and Leo Ribuffo

10. How the Faithful Voted
    John C. Green and John Dilulio

11. How Should We Talk? Religion and Public Discourse
    Jean Bethke Elshtain and William McGurn

12. The New Christian Right in Historical Context
    Leo Ribuffo and David Shribman

13. The Rights and Wrongs of Religion in Politics
    Stephen Carter and Jeffrey Rosen

---

**Ethics and Public Policy Center**

1015 Fifteenth Street NW, #900  ▪  Washington, DC 20005
202-682-1200  ▪  fax 202-408-0632  ▪  ethics@eppc.org ▪  www.eppc.org