

Global Response to Terrorism: Alliance of Civilizations*

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ABSTRACT

We have observed several inter - and cross-boundary conflicts through last decades. The recent wave of such conflicts is characterized by the rise of terrorism that overlooks all possible boundaries and respects no international law. The call for an alliance of civilizations in response to intolerance and terrorism requires a committed effort by the international community, both by the state institutions and civil society organizations. These efforts can overcome prejudice, misconceptions, misperceptions, and polarization of the international community. This paper addresses dominant narratives in diverse societies, with the aim of providing an effective response to emerging threats to world peace emanating from hostile perceptions that foment violence. The paper discusses cooperation between various initiatives aiming to bridge these divisions in the international community. The paper also presents examples from institutional and civil society practices, from the international community that demonstrates the capabilities and willingness to cooperate for shared values. Alliance of Civilizations movement initiated and organized by Turkey and Spain governments is an example for such a practice from the international community.

Keywords: Alliance of civilizations, clash of civilizations, international conflicts, intolerance, terrorism, global response

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Introduction

The world has never faced throughout human history such a great need of international cooperation and coalescence as it does today. For the last decades humanity witnessed several conflicts, some of which are still active and have profound impacts on today. One of the most striking problems brought up by the last century is the spread of terrorism predominantly nurtured by extremism and radicalism. Unquestionably the worst and most murderous of these attacks was the 9/11 event when four planes were hijacked by extremist terrorists and used to slam into buildings and places of civilian nature causing 2973 civilian deaths and huge economic loss for American nation. Though there were many records of terrorist attacks throughout the 20th century, 9/11 gained much more special attention and raised many questions about terrorism that were previously disregarded (Kapitan, 2003). They were most of the times disregarded because most of the wealthy and superpower nations, especially United States, felt secure in this regard. Not until the US understood that even its own land may be under threat. 9/11 made clear that no nation is secure against terrorism and it is a problem of all nations to deal with this matter.

One of the most important issues when dealing with worldwide conflicts in general, and the rhetoric of terrorism in particular, however, is the need of due attention to the source and roots of enmity fomenting atrocities of above-mentioned type. The most widespread idea attempting to explain the causes of inter- and cross-boundary conflicts is Samuel P. Huntington's thesis of "clash of civilizations," which states that it is the distinguishing characteristics of different civilizations, cultures and communities, the most important of which is religion, that cause conflicts between them. Several practical examples on the institutional and civil level of the last decade, on the other hand, prove the opposite. Alliance of Civilizations is one of such examples, which is a global project launched by Prime Ministers of Turkey and Spain in 2004 with the aim to "overcome today's dominant prejudices, misconceptions, misperceptions, and polarization in different societies and to bring about cooperation between them to provide an effective response to emerging threats to world peace emanating from hostile perceptions that foment violence" (Alliance of Civilizations, n.d.). Alliance of Civilizations is a practical instance, therefore, showing the possibility and viability of inter-cultural (civilization) cooperation for common values that would produce a safer and peaceful world (Friedman, 2000; Fukuyama, 1995). The idea is discussed in light of international theories and is claimed to be supported by constructivist-liberalist duality.

The Clash of Civilizations

Since most of the latest international conflicts, among which 9/11 was the most disastrous, allegedly seem to reflect crises based on religious ideologies, the well-known “clash of civilizations” proposed by Bernard Lewis and promoted by Samuel P. Huntington gained relatively high prominence among scholarly and political circles (Etzioni, 2007; Karliga, 2004). According to Huntington, “culture and cultural identities, which at the broadest level are civilizational identities, are shaping patterns of cohesion, disintegration, and conflict in the post-Cold War period” (Huntington, 1996, p. 20). Therefore, to him, the twenty-first century will witness more conflicts based on those civilizational identities. He argues that “some inter-civilizational relations are more conflict-prone than others. At the micro level, the most violent fault lines are between Islam and its Orthodox, Hindu, African and Western Christians neighbors. At the macro level, the dominant division is “the West and the rest”, with the most intense conflicts occurring between Muslim and Asian societies on the one hand, and the West on the other” (Huntington, 1996, p. 183). What is crucial in Huntington’s thesis, therefore, is that the future conflicts will predominantly result from civilizational differences of religious background, and mainly between Islam and the West.

The Rise of Terrorism

Huntington’s thesis gained much support especially after the terrorist attacks of 9/11, which was a turning point in American, as well as world’s history. Though it was America who witnessed murderous terrorist attacks of 9/11, it is rightly possible to divide the history of not only America (Pojman, 2003), but of the whole world, into “Before September 11” and “After September 11”. The 9/11 showed that no place in the world is anymore safe from battles that were previously fought on the lands of others (Esposito, 2002). The terrorist attacks did not stop and continued to take lives of civilians of different nations and communities. The most significant of these were the terrorist acts in Turkey, Spain, and UK since 2001, and nowadays continuing terrorism acts in Middle East.

With the rise of terrorism throughout the world, the rhetoric of the term gained relevant importance on international agenda (Sloan 2006). Though historically terrorism is not a new notion (Sterba, 2003), the usage of the term today has significantly changed. It has become a widespread notion that Muslims are terrorists and that Islam nurtures ideas about killing innocent people (Kassam, 2003), which is a failure “to distinguish between the

religion of Islam and mainstream Muslims, and the extremists who hijack Islamic discourse and belief to justify their acts of terrorism” (Esposito, 2002, p. 1). Mainly because of this fact it became widespread to explain international conflicts through the lenses of “clash of civilizations.” Therefore, it is important today to better understand terrorism and try to find the ways to respond to it (Sterba, 2003). In addition to the need of change in the use of rhetoric of terrorism, we should also look for the driving forces behind terrorism and seek to remove them (Kapitan, 2003). The 9/11 attacks, in this regard, were indeed a sign of danger surrounding all – all the countries, cultures, and peoples of the world. It is, therefore, a time “for global engagement and coalition building, for the active promotion of coexistence and cooperation, rather than provoking a clash of civilizations” (Esposito, 2002, p. xii).

Global Response to Terrorist Attacks: Selected Cases

The world has observed several events in recent years that have led to mutual hatred, misunderstanding and fear between societies and such international conditions have been exploited by merciless extremists everywhere (Annan, 2005). The terrorist attacks by extremists not only targeted western democracies but also the eastern societies such as Indonesia and India (Sahin, Kapuc, and Unlu 2008). The following cases clearly depict the picture several nations were faced (see figure 1).

New York, United States

It was a sunny morning of September 11, 2001, when 19 terrorists, hijacked four commercial planes and led them toward chosen targets with the aim of destruction. Two of those passenger planes, were flown into the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York City and the third was smashed into the Pentagon, the main headquarters of the U.S. military located in Arlington, Virginia. The fourth plane was apparently intended to hit some important objective in the Washington, D.C., district, but was unsuccessful and crashed in a field in rural Pennsylvania.

The terrorists had an affiliation with the al-Qaeda, an extremist Islamic group led by Saudi exile Osama bin Laden who declared a holy war against United States. The chosen targets for destruction were financial, political, and military symbols of the US. The death toll was more than on any other day in American history since the American Civil War (September 11 Attacks, n.d.).

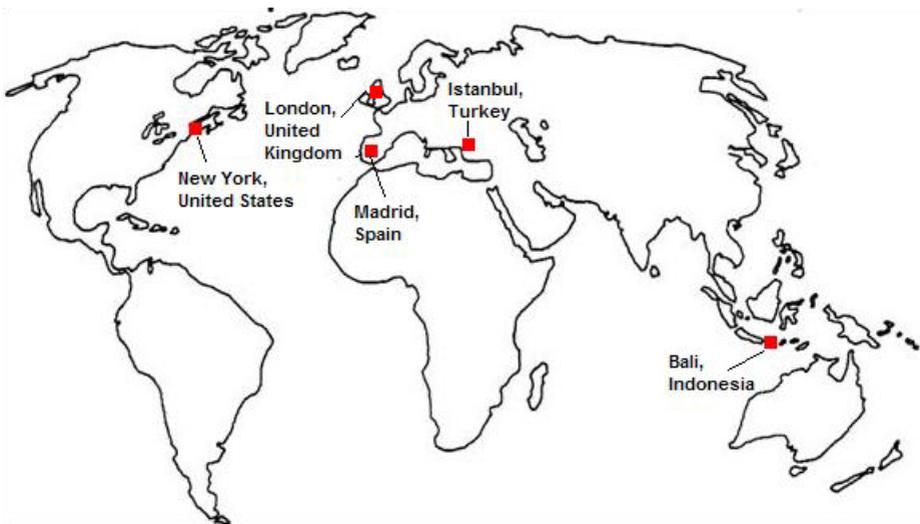


Figure 1: Map of Selected Terrorst Attacks

Bali, Indonesia

On 12 Oct 2002, in the most violent incident ever to occur on the Indonesian island of Bali a total of 202 people died and 209 were injured. The bomb blast occurred in front of a club, killing both foreign tourists and locales, among which 89 were Australians. Abu Bakar Bashir, the leader of the Southeast Asian terrorist group Jemaah Islamiah with ties to al-Qaeda, who is often accused of being behind the attacks, was charged and found guilty of conspiracy over the attacks (Bali Bombings, n.d.).

Another case in regard to Indonesia occurred 3 years later on October 1, 2005 again in Bali. 26 people were killed and more than 50 were injured in three bombings on the Indonesian touristic resort island (BBC Asia Pacific, 2005). Though there were no claims of responsibility officials claimed that the attacks again traced to Jemaah Islamiah (CNN World, 2005).

Istanbul, Turkey

Turkey witnessed two bombing cases in 2003. The first bombing occurred on November 15 aiming at Beth Israel and Neve Shalom synagogues in Istanbul, which resulted in 27 deaths and more than 300 injures. The second bombing occurred five days later on November 20 targeting the British Consulate and the HSBC bank headquarters again in Istanbul. The attack

killed 27, among them the British Consul, and injured more than 400 people. Later al-Qaeda claimed responsibility for both attacks (BBC Europe, 2003).

Madrid, Spain

On March 11, 2004 Spain was shocked by bombings in Madrid's train network that killed 191 and injured 1,824. Along the serious tolls the attack caused major psychological and political fall-out that made newly elected government re-evaluate its global anti-terror policy related to Iraq. The responsibility for the attacks was claimed by al-Qaeda related group. As a result of the manhunt operations by the government 29 suspects related to the incident were brought to trial in February 2007 (CNN In-Depth Specials, n.d.).

London, United Kingdom

The last case is that of the UK, in which four suicide bombers struck in central London on July 7, 2005. The target of the coordinated attacks this time was the city's transport system. Three explosions occurred at 8:50 a.m., within fifty seconds on three London Underground trains. The fourth bomb targeted a bus and exploded nearly an hour later at 9:47 a.m. The toll was 52 deaths and more than 770 injuries (BBC In-Depth London Attack, n.d.). The violent terrorist act, for which there have been no confirmed claims of responsibility to day, was the deadliest attack in Britain since World War II (CNN Special Reports, n.d.).

Alliances of Civilizations in Response to Terrorist Attacks

The above-mentioned cases of terrorism acts since the turn of the 21st century are examples of what any nation can face. They especially point to the fact that it can happen regardless of the target nation's ethnic, religious, cultural or social background. Terrorists, as the representative of India Rangachari stated in his speech during the two-day session on the Dialogue among Civilizations at fifty-sixth General Assembly Plenary 40th Meeting of the United Nations (UN), do not belong to any civilization, and reject tolerance and diversity as values central to all civilizations (UN Press Release, 2001). It is therefore important to note that cultural, religious and civilizational diversity "contribute to the richness and potential of human existence and as such need to be protected and respected" (Palma Summary Notes, 2005). Despite the significant need of dissemination of such ideas throughout the world due to the fact of globalization, it becomes more

difficult to bridge cultural gaps today as civilizations possess certain prejudices and misconceptions (Naumkin, RIA Novosti, 2006).

It is with this very aim that the Alliance of Civilizations initiative was launched in 2005 by the United Nations in support of the proposal of Spanish Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero (Alliance of Civilizations, n.d.). Though there was a project of similar nature advanced by former Iranian President Mohammad Khatami called “Dialogue among Civilizations,” it is not promoted globally by all governments as a joint action program (Naumkin, n.d.), which makes it less effective. Alliance of Civilizations, on the other hand, is a “response to the need for a committed effort by international community at institutional and civil society levels” (Alliance of Civilizations, n.d.) to construct an alliance between different cultures, nations and people (Puniyani, 2006). The origin of the initiative traces back to March 2004 general elections in Spain which were held 3 days after March 11 Madrid bombings. As the victor of the elections the Prime Minister Zapatero immediately changed the national policy of fight with terrorism and adopted a softer stand characterized by dialogue (Balci, 2007). In September 2004 at the United Nations General Assembly meeting Zapatero proposed the notion of “Alliance of Civilizations” stating that “some years ago a wall collapsed, we must prevent hatred and incomprehension from building a new one” (Simancas, n.d.). Upon advice of the UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan to continue the project with a Muslim country, in July 2005 Zapatero offered to Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan to co-chair the initiative. Co-sponsored by Spain and Turkey after that, the UN officially declared the start of the initiative on July 14, 2005 (Balci, 2007). On September 2, 2005 a high-level group (HLG) composed of 18 eminent persons from political, academic, religious and media sphere was created with the aim to guide the initiative, and to generate a report with an analysis of that-day level of polarization and extremism between the cultures and suggestions to eliminate them (UN Report, 2006).

The HLG was supposed to meet five times to discuss the issues and submit the report by the end of 2006. The first meeting was held in November 2005 at Palma de Mallorca, Spain, with the aim to discuss the future program of the Alliance (Events, n.d.). The second meeting occurred in February 2006 in Doha, Qatar and ended up in the Report on Education emphasizing the importance of education for practical fulfillment of the idea of “Alliance of Civilizations” (Report on Education, 2006). During this meeting the top UN official Annan one more time repeated the commitment of the Alliance to counter extremism with the aim to construct dialogue between cultures and societies (Gulf Times, 2006). The third meeting was held in May 2006 in Dakar, Senegal the main topics of which were education, media, youth and

integration (UN News Centre, 2006). Then in September 2006 the Group met in New York to review the draft report that would be before Secretary-General Kofi Annan in November at the last fifth meeting of the HLG (Events, n.d.).

The final report presented in November, which prioritized Muslim-Western relations, is composed of two parts. The first part analyzes the global context of relations between Western and Muslim societies and presents recommendations characterized by HLG's belief that certain political steps are must for substantial progress. The second part of the report states that cross-cultural tensions have gone beyond politics and set in the minds of people. In this regard, the HLG made recommendations related to four thematic areas: education, migration, youth and media (UN Report, 2006).

The report was of special importance since it stated that "it was politics, not religion, at the heart of growing Muslim-West divide" (UN Report Press Release, 2006). Therefore, we should focus on the ways religion is utilized for political purposes (Naumkin, 2006), not on the religion per se. However, the way to put it into practice has little to do with governments' efforts on their own, simply because governments are temporary and have policy agendas loaded with their own political interests. Alliance of Civilizations initiative becomes crucial at this very stage when politics can accomplish only some part of the job. In other words, it is the common effort of not only governments, but also international institutions and civil society to prevent cross-cultural hatred, hostility, alienation and violence (Naumkin, 2006). It is of paramount importance "to put these words of goodwill into practice and we need to make peace an integral part of our living; each individual, each family, each community must serve as a building block for a global peace" (Laohaphan, 2005). Totally rejecting Huntington's idea of "clash of civilizations" in his paper on philosophical foundations of civilizational dialogue, Kochler goes further stating that "for those who are concerned about the human race, a *universal* dialogue of civilizations is of crucial importance for the future of mankind because such a dialogue is a basic condition of peace and stability on both the national and the transnational level; this dialogue may help to define a common set of values and principles that govern international relations in the era of global communication" (Kochler, 1997).

Discussion

The structure and the topic of this paper presents an opportunity to evaluate above-mentioned claims and statements in light of international relations

theories. Since the alleged clash or proposed alliance of civilizations has mostly to do with cross-boundary and global issues, the authors of this paper deemed international relations theories as the most relevant tool for evaluation and explanations. The most important point in this regard, though, is that it is impossible to explain today's world in light of only one single theory. The authors take duality approach in this regard. Accordingly, the clash of civilizations idea proposed by Huntington mainly fits the realist theories characterized by conflict-prone nature and pessimistic views about the existing order, system or regime. The idea takes the conflict aspect of realist theories and links it to constructivist approach, which claims that it is not actors, but beliefs, ideas, identities and goals that dominate international political arena and shape the course of actions on other levels. Therefore, it is allegedly civilizational identities, beliefs and values that lead to clash of civilizations. Contrary to this realist-constructivist duality, however, the Alliance of Civilizations focuses on liberalist-constructivist duality, which envisions plurality of actors and room for inter-entity cooperation through liberalism, and accepts the importance of involved actors', entities' values and norms in shaping their preferences in terms of course of action. At the same time, the Alliance of Civilization idea adopts liberalist notion stating that it is not what you can do, but what you want to do that makes up a decision, thus emphasizing the importance and prevalence of political and civic will in structuring political agendas.

The question of which claim and proposal is viable today is the further step to be analyzed in regard to the topic. While globalization inevitably leads to interaction of diverse values, norms, identities and beliefs, thus, paving way to awareness of differences and value gaps, it also presents a prospect of bridging those gaps through liberalist concepts inherited in globalization. In other words, while there is a threat posed by realist theories focusing on conflict and clashes, there is also a liberalist side compensating for possible threats to inter-civilizational peace. This very liberalist ideas linked with the constructivist idea of prevalence of values and identities in international arena gradually become a mainstream approach, thus forcing realist ideas to fade out. While predominance of liberalist-constructivist duality in international arena is clear, it would be naive, though, to totally disregard realist claims. It is ultimately in the hands of statesmen to promote proposed alliance of civilizations, which is only viable through more passive state actors and more active third parties at all levels of the society across the world. It would be the victory of 'alliance of civilizations' over 'clash of civilizations' if and when political will cooperates with civic will to take decisions on behalf of the respective constituencies towards intra and inter-civilizational peace.

Conclusion

Since the turn of the century the world has observed several cases of terrorist attacks and violent acts. The most important drive for it has been extremism stemming from mutual hatred, prejudice and misconceptions in depths of people's minds and hearts. Though some allege that the only victims of the evil is West and Western countries, the terrorist acts of recent years targeting Muslim-populated countries as well showed that terrorists are not of particular nation, civilization or culture, and that any nation can be a target of a violent action. It therefore showed and proved the need for intergovernmental, intercultural and inter-civilizational cooperation, which would promote dialogue and shared values among all. Alliance of Civilizations initiative launched by the United Nations in 2005 in support of the co-sponsorship of Spain and Turkey is a perfect example towards those ends. It has a potential to utilize not only the efforts of governments, but also international organizations and civil society, which is crucial to melt down the prejudices and misconceptions in the hearts of the masses. The alliance of civilization and the friendship of people can manage to do something that would have never been managed with money, politics, or weapons. Therefore, along with inter-governmental diplomatic efforts it is also partly a job of international and civil society organizations to promote dialogue and peace among nations, cultures and civilizations. The best model to embrace such initiatives would be liberalist-constructivist duality in terms of international relations theories, which envisions inter-entity cooperation aimed at bridging the gap based on diversity and differences in cultural, social, religious and civilizational values, beliefs, norms and identities.

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