

## The “Clash of Civilizations” Thesis

### Source A

It is my hypothesis that the fundamental source of conflict in this new world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural. Nation states will remain the most powerful actors in world affairs, but the principal conflicts of global politics will occur between nations and groups of different civilizations. The clash of civilizations will dominate global politics. The fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future.

Samuel Huntington, “The Clash of Civilizations”, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 73, No. 3 (1993), p. 22

### Source B

Why has civilisation analysis become so popular in the post-Cold War world, particularly in the wake of 11 September and in the context of the ensuing ‘war on terror’? One reason is that civilisational analysis has provided language and concepts through which to understand and explain 11 September. ... [C]ivilisational analysis provides a useful middle range theory between state and globalisation. The events of 11 September demonstrated the limits of seeking to understand world politics as simply the interaction between nation-states. Nor could it be understood simply in terms of the impact of the forces of globalisation. The attack and its response drew upon broad cultural and religious sources of identity that civilisational analysis can address. Civilisational analysis provides the capacity to envisage contemporary political identities not confined by territory, and broad in historical scale that draw on deep and powerful resources from history, culture and religion that go beyond the state. Civilisational analysis also allows us to think about localisation: how different societies have experienced and interpreted contemporary or similar processes with different or parallel effects.

Jacinta O’Hagan, “Beyond the Clash of Civilizations?” *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 59, No. 3 (Sept. 2005), pp. 383-84.

### Source C

Dominant International norms and central international organizations reflect to a large extent the values of the most powerful members of the international community. The OECD coalition has been the most powerful, and particularly in terms of basic norms and diplomatic practices, OECD states, along with certain other actors, have made a liberal imprint on international relations. At least in this one sense, and for limited purposes, it is correct to view international relations sometimes as a clash of civilizations. For all their domestic imperfections and imperialistic foreign policies, the liberal democracies have advanced the notion of the equal autonomy of and respect for the individual. History does not move in straight lines, but certain ideas do advance. Should an authoritarian China come to dominate international relations, the place of human rights in world affairs would change. ...

Other troubling factors can also be briefly noted – e.g. repressive trends in Russia, the growing power of authoritarian Iran, Pakistan’s inability to suppress illiberal Islamist movements, India’s colonial experience and hence its distaste for western-inspired review of national policies (not to mention its highly repressive control of Kashmir), and so on.

David Forsythe, *Human Rights in International Relations* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. 2012), p. 9.

### Source D

The events of 9/11 and their aftermath in Afghanistan and Iraq have shaken scholarly assumptions about “the end of history” and the post-Cold War peace dividend – and the study of religion has suddenly emerged into the glare of public attention. Is religious conflict now the central issue? Were the prophecies of a new “clash of civilizations” being realized? Speculation about these matters was fed by a rapidly expanding literature on everything from the causes of terrorism to divisions in the Atlantic alliance, the prospects for democracy in the Middle East, and the nature of Islamic beliefs.

Social scientists are divided concerning whether the process of secularization is reducing the role of religion in everyday life – or whether the world’s major religious faiths are experiencing a strong resurgence. ...

We believe that the importance of religiosity persists most strongly among vulnerable populations, especially those living in poorer nations, facing personal survival-threatening risks. We argue that feelings of vulnerability to physical, societal, and personal risks, are a key factor driving religiosity and we demonstrate that the process of secularization – a systematic erosion of religious practices, values, and beliefs – has occurred most clearly among the most prosperous social sectors living in affluent and secure post-industrial nations. ...

The world as a whole now has more people with traditional religious views than ever before – and they constitute a growing proportion of the world’s population.

Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 2011), pp. xiii, and 4-5.

### Source E

Huntington is an ideologist, someone who wants to make "civilizations" and "identities" into what they are not: shut-down, sealed-off entities that have been purged of the myriad currents and countercurrents that animate human history, and that over centuries have made it possible for that history not only to contain wars of religion and imperial conquest but also to be one of exchange, cross-fertilization and sharing. This far less visible history is ignored in the rush to highlight the ludicrously compressed and constricted warfare that "the clash of civilizations" argues is the reality. ....

The basic paradigm of West versus the rest (the cold war opposition reformulated) remained untouched, and this is what has persisted, often insidiously and implicitly, in discussion since the terrible events of September 11. The carefully planned and horrendous, pathologically motivated suicide attack and mass slaughter by a small group of deranged militants has been turned into proof of Huntington's thesis.

Edward W. Said, “The Clash of Ignorance”, *The Nation*, 22 Oct. 2001, available at: <http://www.thenation.com/article/clash-ignorance#>

### Source F

To evaluate the empirical accuracy of Huntington’s claims, we examined the relationship between civilization membership and interstate war between 1816 and 1992. We find that civilization membership was not significantly associated with the onset of interstate war during the Cold War era (1946–1988), which is consistent with one aspect of Huntington’s thesis; however, we also find that for the pre–Cold War period (1816–1945) states of similar civilizations were more likely to fight each other than were those of different civilizations, which contradicts Huntington’s thesis. Most importantly, our analysis reveals that during the post–Cold War era (1989–1992), the period in which Huntington contends that the clash of civilizations should be most apparent, civilization membership was not significantly associated with the probability of interstate war. All told, our findings challenge Huntington’s

claims and seriously undermine the policy recommendations that devolve from his clash of civilizations thesis.

Errol A Henderson and Richard Tucker, "Clear and Present Strangers: The Clash of Civilizations and International Conflict", *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 45, No. 2 (2001), p. 317.

### **Source G**

Huntington claims that peoples and countries, asking the existential questions of "Who am I?" and "Where do I belong?" (p. 96), naturally gravitate to others of like cultures, leading to the natural civilizational clumping of their interests and actions on the world stage. And yet when he comes right down to analyzing any particular issue, the primary actors are not civilizations, but states, just as the "realist school" predicts. To be sure, Huntington does say that states will remain primary actors even in the clash of civilizations (p. 21), but he asserts that the cleavages between states will be determined by civilizational differences. His favorite case study is Bosnia, a civilizational "fault-line" bringing Western, Orthodox, and Islamic civilizations into close contact and conflict (chap. 11). The problem with this analysis, of course, is that the United States intervened on behalf of the Bosnian Muslims, which Huntington does acknowledge as "a noncivilizational anomaly in the otherwise universal pattern of kin backing kin" (p. 281); Huntington then spends some time explaining away this "anomaly" (pp. 288–91).

Robert Marks, review of Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (1996), in *Journal of World History*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (2000), p. 104.

### **Essay Question:**

Using these sources and your own knowledge evaluate Samuel Huntington's "Clash of Civilizations" thesis.