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A Clash of Paradigms: The Clash of Civilizations in the Worldviews of Samuel Huntington and Osama bin Laden

Eric Massie

Since the terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001, the “Clash of Civilizations” theory has become an unavoidable aspect of academic debate between those scholars who either endorse or angrily reject its thesis of a conflict between Islamic and Western societies. During these academic debates, scholars have often compared the world views and beliefs of Samuel Huntington and Osama bin Laden in order to demonstrate the development of a similar intellectual trend in Western and Islamic
societies.\textsuperscript{1} The comparison, however, is often made casually, without serious examination or analysis of the significant similarities and differences in their ideas. Due to the sensitive and often emotional nature of the debate surrounding the “Clash of Civilizations,” it is important to determine exactly what similarities and differences exist between the two viewpoints, so as to avoid incorrect generalizations. Whereas Samuel Huntington and Osama bin Laden share a common belief in a “Clash of Civilizations” and utilize much of the same historical evidence, they draw very different conclusions as to the nature and causes of the conflict. As a result, the vocabulary and terminology as well as the established conditions for termination of the conflict are radically different. The purpose of this paper is not to determine the validity of the claims of either Osama bin Laden or Samuel Huntington, but merely to examine and analyze their writings, interviews, and statements\textsuperscript{2} to compare the content and themes of their respective paradigms.


\textsuperscript{2} There is naturally going to be a certain degree of variation in the translations of Osama Bin Laden’s works due to the fact that many of them come from different sources and different translators. I have attempted to provide the greatest degree of consistency by relying primarily upon Bruce Lawrence’s compilation in his book, Messages to the World. Bruce Lawrence, Messages to the World: The Statements of Osama Bin Laden, trans. James Howarth (New York: Verso, 2005).
Paradigms of Power

Political and historical events, when considered in isolation, are never self-explanatory in that they never announce the underlying pattern or theme that might attach those events to a larger historical or political phenomenon. As a result, social scientists often develop paradigms within which they seek to interpret and explain events. Whether it is colonialism, globalism, nationalism, or other “ism’s,” these paradigms serve as reference points, allowing social scientists to explain historical developments within an interpretive framework from which they can make comparisons and predictions. Following in this tradition, Samuel Huntington and Osama bin Laden have established separate, but opposing, paradigms with which to interpret history and recent political events. With a belief in a “Clash of Civilizations” between Islam and the West as their central idea, both are paradigms concerning the distribution of global power among civilizations.

The end of the Cold War brought an abrupt end to the bipolar military and political domination of world affairs long exercised by the United States and the Soviet Union. With the collapse and dissolution of Soviet communism, Samuel Huntington and Osama bin Laden both assert that the end of the Cold War has brought a renewal and intensification of conflict based upon cultural differences. As the person who originally
coined the phrase “Clash of Civilizations” in his 1993 article of the same name, Samuel Huntington contends: “In the post-Cold War world for the first time in history, global politics has become multi-polar and multi-civilizational.”\(^3\) Defining a civilization as the broadest means of self identification in terms of “ancestry, language, history, customs and institutions,”\(^4\) Huntington suggests a post-Cold War multi-polar world in which civilizations instead of ideologies compete militarily, economically, and culturally. Identifying seven, and possibly eight, civilizations that include Sinic, Japanese, Hindu, Islamic, Orthodox, Western, Latin American, and possibly African civilizations, Huntington’s paradigm predicts that because culture is now more important than any other distinction, societies of the same civilization will cooperate with one another against the others.\(^5\) “In civilizational conflicts,” states Huntington, “kin stand by their kin.”\(^6\)

Similarly, Osama bin Laden believes the end of the Cold War has precipitated a renewal of cultural conflict between the West and Islam. Identifying the United States as the leader of Western civilization, he states


\(^4\) Ibid.

\(^5\) Ibid., 45-47.

\(^6\) Ibid., 217.
that “after the end of the Cold War, America escalated its campaign against the Muslim world in its entirety, aiming to get rid of Islam itself.” 7 For bin Laden, this assault upon the Islamic world by the United States is characterized by political, military and economic policies that are seen as specifically targeted at Muslims. These include wars fought against Iraq in 1991 and 2003 which have resulted in the occupation of Baghdad, one of Islam’s former capitals, by American troops; 8 the imposition of a system of economic sanctions against Iraq from 1991-2003, which bin Laden asserts has caused the deaths of “a million innocent children;” 9 air strikes against Afghanistan 10 and Sudan in 1998, the latter of which destroyed a pharmaceutical factory in Khartoum that produced half of Sudan’s medicines; 11 bombing campaigns against Iraq in 1998 12 and 2001, 13 and the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001. 14

8 Ibid., 180.
9 Ibid., 104.
10 Ibid., 85.
11 Ibid., 67.
12 Ibid., 66-68.
13 Ibid., 149.
14 Ibid., 134.
By equating Islamic civilization with the religion of Islam, bin Laden is, by extension, equating these violations of Islamic territorial integrity as an attack upon Islam and, thus, upon all Muslim peoples. For bin Laden, Islam is more than just a religion; it’s an identifiable and contiguous territory, leading him to conclude that “any act of aggression against even a hand’s span of this land [Islamic territory]” makes it a duty for Muslims to defend it. The renewal of this conflict is interpreted by bin Laden as a “Crusade” by the Christian West against the Islamic “ummah [the global Islamic community],’ which requires a civilizational response. Although, bin Laden does not identify any other civilizations specifically by name, his identification of the West and Islam as separate cultural identities suggests the existence of other separate cultural identities that are neither Christian nor Islamic in nature. Since these two specific cultural identities do not encapsulate the entire population of the world, bin Laden is, in effect, recognizing that other cultural identities exist, such as Hindus and Buddhists who are in conflict with Muslims in Kashmir and Xinjiang.

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15 Ibid., 49.

16 Ibid., 135.

17 The term “ummah” is often used by Osama bin Laden to refer to the global Islamic community, without consideration of national boundaries. For historians, it also represents an early period of Islamic history after Muhammad’s emigration to Medina but before its political and doctrinal divisions into Sunnis and Shias.
Thus, it is clear culture is the most significant and important object of self-identification and loyalty in the post-Cold War world for both Samuel Huntington and Osama bin Laden. Yet, each defines culture differently, attributing different processes and attributes to it, and emphasizing different aspects of it. Whereas Huntington identifies the central elements of culture as “language and religion,” of which religion is the most important, he also asserts that historical processes and legacies are also of significant importance in their contributions to the overall culture of a civilization.  

In defining the attributes of Western civilization, Huntington identifies the Protestant and Catholic character of Western society by including within it those nations that have historically comprised Western Christendom as well as other European settler countries. However, he also attributes to it a historical legacy that includes the separation of spiritual and temporal authority, development of the rule of law, social pluralism, representative bodies, and individualism. These historical and social developments are also largely responsible for shaping Western institutions and cultural practices outside of religious customs and philosophical foundations.

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19 Ibid., 46-47.

20 Ibid., 70-72.
Osama bin Laden, however, perceives culture in more basic terms. For him, Islamic culture is not the culmination of historical and social processes that have conferred upon Islamic civilization its institutions and customs, but is the abode of the revelations of Muhammad and the religion of Islam. Thus, the most basic religious customs and institutions of Islam transcend and render insignificant other aspects of culture such as language, ethnicity, and a common historical heritage. When he describes Islamic civilization as stretching from “Indonesia, the Philippines, Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan to the Arab world and finally to Nigeria and Mauritania” he is emphasizing the only aspect of culture that they all have in common; Islam as a religion. Due to this perception of Islamic culture as being synonymous with Islam as a religion, bin Laden perceives the actions of the West and other cultures as also being motivated by their religions. This leads him to conclude that the actions of the West against Islamic societies are, as he states, intended “to get rid of Islam itself” in which those actions are perceived to be an attack on the Islamic community as a religious entity. For this reason, attempts by the United States to promote the adoption of such Western ideas and institutions as liberal democracy, and their acceptance by portions of Islamic society, are seen by bin Laden as

21 Bruce Lawrence, Messages to the World, 134.

22 Ibid., 39.
the most egregious apostasy, since they are perceived as an attempt by the West to undermine Islamic ideas and institutions. Thus, liberal democracy, along with socialism, communism, and Pan-Arabism, are perceived by bin Laden as “earthly religions”\(^\text{23}\) that are threatening to supplant the one true religion of Islam.

It is this differing perception of culture between Samuel Huntington and Osama bin Laden that is largely responsible for their differing perspectives of the conflict that they believe is emerging in the post-Cold War world. Adhering to his perception of culture as an amalgamation of religion coupled with social and historical processes that are unique products of a particular civilization, Huntington envisions the clash of civilizations as one that lies in the “fundamental questions of power and culture.”\(^\text{24}\) In his paradigm, the greatest threats to Western civilization are Islamic and Sinic [Chinese/Confucian]\(^\text{25}\) civilizations that are experiencing a cultural resurgence and are actively challenging the diffusion of Western values and institutions such as liberal democracy and human rights in favor

\(^\text{23}\) Ibid., 218.

\(^\text{24}\) Huntington, The Clash of Civilizations, 212.

\(^\text{25}\) In Samuel Huntington’s 1993 article, “The Clash of Civilizations?,” he originally described Chinese and neighboring Chinese-influenced societies as a “Confucian Civilization,” but in his 1996 book, The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order, he redefined this civilization as Sinic, in recognition of the fact that these societies are an aggregate of multiple cultural influences and cannot be defined solely by their Confucian philosophical heritage.
of their own cultural values and institutions. To accomplish this, Huntington states that they will “attempt to expand their own economic and military power to resist and to ‘balance’ against the West.”26 The main way in which the Islamic and Sinic civilizations are attempting to attain this balance, according to Huntington, is by cooperating with one another against the interests of the West. This “Confucian-Islamic connection” is thus perceived to be the main means by which Islamic and Sinic civilizations can forcefully redistribute global power more equally in their favor.27

The religious and cultural considerations that dominate the paradigm of bin Laden, however, prevent him from even considering a Sinic-Islamic alliance a possibility. His perception of Western and Sinic societies are the same; as unbelievers who have not recognized the transcendent truth of Islam. Believing the West is resuming a “Crusader war”28 against Islam as a whole, bin Laden is primarily concerned with the defense of Islamic lands, the prevention of the slaughter of its people, and the liberation of its occupied holy places for which he believes the rest of the world is complicit. It is for this very reason that he does not even

26 Huntington, The Clash of Civilizations, 29.

27 Ibid., 185.

28 Bruce Lawrence, Messages of the World, 183.
mention the Sinic civilization directly, but only calls upon “believers”29 and “people of faith”30 to the defense of Islam and Islamic territories. This sole reliance upon Muslims as defenders of the faith is clear when he states that “every Muslim should rise up and defend his religion.”31 This emphasis upon religion prevents bin Laden from seeking allies outside of Islam, whereas Huntington’s perception of culture does not.

Osama bin Laden, however, is not only concerned with enemies that threaten Islam from outside its borders. Much of his paradigm concerns the occupation of Islamic land and holy places by the “Crusader people of the West”32 as enabled by the complicity of Muslim rulers. According to bin Laden, these rulers have facilitated this occupation by importing Western values and institutions and by permitting the occupation of Muslim holy places and territory while maintaining the internal divisions of the ummah, preventing it from defending itself.33 Stating that a “major unbelief”34 takes a

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29 Ibid., 202.
30 Ibid., 201.
31 Ibid., 105.
32 Ibid., 134.
33 Ibid., 15.
34 Ibid., 34.
Muslim “out of the fold of Islam,” bin Laden proceeds to accuse and condemn Islamic rulers for the “imposition of man made legislation” whose inspiration is perceived as coming from Western civilization, and thus, is in contradiction to divinely inspired Qur’anic law. This betrayal of Islamic cultural foundations is magnified by the close economic and military cooperation of many Islamic nations with the West as embodied by the power and influence of the United States. This is epitomized by bin Laden’s condemnation of the rulers of Saudi Arabia, the country of his birth, as apostates for having committed “an act against Islam” by allying with the United States, which has cast them “outside [of] the religious community.” This economic and military cooperation with the United States is exacerbated by Muslim rulers’ “acceptance of, and appeals to, the heretical United Nations” whose secular authority and claims to international legitimacy has “contravened the legitimacy of the Qur'an and the teachings of the Prophet.” For bin Laden, these apostate rulers are

35 Ibid.
36 Ibid., 196.
37 Ibid., 45.
38 Ibid.
39 Ibid., 197.
40 Ibid., 136.
they who have cooperated with the United States and United Nations and this cooperation is the reason why Muslims have been unsuccessful in uniting and defending themselves against the aggression of the West. Whereas bin Laden has internal enemies within Islamic civilization to contend with, Samuel Huntington makes no mention of enemies within Western civilization that could threaten the security of the West.

Another significant feature of the paradigms of both Samuel Huntington and Osama bin Laden is the escalation of their respective civilizational conflicts to one that is global in scope. Whereas they initially speak of the dangers of one or two opposing civilizations, both paradigms succumb to an escalation whereby their civilization is placed in opposition to all other civilizations. Huntington’s paradigm yields to this escalation when he states the macro level of civilizational competition will be between “the West and the Rest” in that “the Rest,” including all other civilizations, will be attempting to constantly assert themselves politically and militarily at the expense of “the West” and its current dominant position in global politics.41

For bin Laden, the identification of Islamic civilization solely with the religion of Islam made it somewhat inevitable that the scope of the conflict would be widened. Whereas initially he spoke out against the

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global crusaders, identified as the West and anyone who cooperated with the West, his paradigm eventually collapses into a bipolar perception of the world in which the world has been split into “two camps: one of faith, with no hypocrites, and one of unbelief.”\footnote{Bruce Lawrence, Messages to the World, 105.} This transition is likely due to the fact that all of the aggression perpetrated against Islamic countries could not be justified solely as Christian crusader zeal, especially when considering areas of conflict between Muslims and Hindus in Kashmir, or Chinese oppression of Turkish Muslims in Xinjiang. This transition establishes a stable global paradigm whereas the allegiances of the globe are divided between “global unbelief, with the apostates today under the leadership of America, on one side, and the Islamic ummah and its brigades of Mujahidin, on the other.”\footnote{Ibid., 250.} This transition, in effect, simplifies the conflict wherein those who either are not or can not be considered friends are considered enemies. This applies not only to rival civilizations but to individual dissenters within Islamic civilization who can be easily relegated to the ranks of apostasy.\footnote{This binary perception of world affairs can also be found in American political discourse, such as when President George W. Bush declared, “Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists,” during his address to a joint session of Congress on September 20th, 2001. President George W. Bush, Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People, Washington, D.C., September 20, 2001, (http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920-8.html), accessed on June 6, 2008.} This escalation of the paradigms of both Huntington and bin Laden seems
to be the result of a certain degree of cultural narcissism, in which their civilization's cultural values are placed at the center of all others, and thus become the target of all the others. Thus, both paradigms degenerate into bipolar world orders in which their civilizations are attempting to defend themselves from the values and power of all the other civilizations.

Another similarity that exists between the worldviews of Samuel Huntington and Osama bin Laden is both of their paradigms bear the heavy weight of history. Both Huntington and bin Laden claim a larger heritage of conflict between Islam and the West has left an indelible mark on their paradigms. Whereas Huntington suggests that is a “continuing and deeply conflictual relation between Islam and Christianity” that began 1400 years ago with the founding of Islam itself, bin Laden believes the conflict goes back much farther. Stating that, “they invaded our countries more than 2,500 years ago,” he attributes the beginning of the East-West conflict to have originated in the antagonisms of the Greek city states and the Mesopotamian and Persian Empires and the invasion of the Middle East by Alexander the Great. By establishing that the first act of aggression was committed by the West, bin Laden is able to portray the West as inherently aggressive, and is able to establish continuity in his assertions that Islam

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45 Huntington, The Clash of Civilizations, 209.

46 Bruce Lawrence, Messages to the World, 217.
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has been and is currently being victimized by the West. When he says of
the Western invaders of 2,500 years ago that their “motive was to steal and
plunder”47 he is attempting to establish a theme within his paradigm that
extends to the actions of the West in the modern day. Huntington,
however, sees the beginnings of an antagonistic relationship between Islam
and the West as beginning with Islamic aggression through the Arab-
Islamic invasion of Europe which was halted at the Battle of Tours in 732
C.E.48 By determining for themselves at which point in history constitutes
the “true beginning” of the conflict between Islam and the West, both are
able to portray their own civilization as being the initial victim of the
other’s aggression.

The nature of this antagonistic relationship between Islam and the
West is, for both bin Laden and Huntington, epitomized by the historical
period of the Crusades. Occurring mostly between the eleventh and
thirteenth centuries, the Crusades were a period of intense violence
between Islamic and Western Christian societies. Responding to an appeal
by Pope Urban II in 1095 C.E. to assist the Orthodox Christians of the East
against the Muslim Turks, European Christian armies from various

47 Ibid.

48 Samuel P. Huntington, “The Clash of Civilizations,” Foreign Affairs 72, no. 3
(1993), (http://www.alamut.com/subj/economics/misc/clash.html), accessed on February
6, 2006.
kingdoms attempted, as Huntington states, “with temporary success to bring Christianity and Christian rule to the Holy Land”\(^{49}\) in what is today modern Israel and Palestine. Culminating in the capture of Jerusalem in 1099 C.E., the Crusaders are credited by some Muslim scholars with the massacre of up to 70,000 Muslims, some of which were ruthlessly dispatched within the sanctuary of the Al-Aqṣa Mosque, the third holiest site in Islam.\(^{50}\) Although, this number is likely exaggerated since it does not appear in the earliest Muslim sources concerning the event, it does reveal the extent to which the brutality of the Crusaders impressed itself upon the psyche of successive Muslim generations.\(^{51}\) This brutality and the occupation of the third holiest site for Islam, al-Haram al-Sharif or the Noble Sanctuary, invoked an Islamic reaction that remains influential for Muslims to the modern day. This reaction, embodied in the concept of defensive Jihad, was waged by Islamic leaders such as Nur al-Din and Salah al-Din against a perceived aggression from outside and was intended merely to repel the invader, not convert him.\(^{52}\) For the next two centuries, Muslims and Christians would battle to determine whether Jerusalem would become

\(^{49}\) Ibid.


\(^{51}\) Ibid., 66.

\(^{52}\) Ibid., 246.
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part of Western Christendom or would remain a part of Islam, with the eventual victory of Islam in the expulsion of the Crusaders completely from the Levant in 1291 C.E.\textsuperscript{53} This concept of defensive Jihad remains a potent symbol for Muslims and has been utilized by bin Laden to describe his efforts to protect the modern ummah from outside aggression.

Both Samuel Huntington and Osama bin Laden use the Crusades as a precedent for the cultural and religious conflict they both believe is reemerging in the post-Cold War world. Whereas Huntington utilizes the historical example only briefly in order to demonstrate that his paradigm is one that transcends the modern period and is rooted in history, it is the central theme of bin Laden’s paradigm. One of the primary differences in the respective paradigms of Osama bin Laden and Samuel Huntington is the ease with which past historical events can be directly related to the conditions of the present. Whereas there are few events that Huntington calls upon from the past to directly relate to the preeminent power position of the West of the present, bin Laden can call upon a plethora of symbols and events from the Crusades that have direct relation to the present for Islam. The Crusades, more than any other event in history, has impressed upon bin Laden a belief that all aggression upon Islamic societies is

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid.
“fundamentally religious in nature.”\textsuperscript{54} This is especially reflected in his paradigm when considering the post-1967 political realities of the Middle East and the occupation of the holy places of Islam. During the Crusades, the occupation of Jerusalem precipitated almost two centuries of intense warfare before the city was reclaimed for Islam by Salah al-Din in 1187 C.E.\textsuperscript{55} Yet, despite this victory over the Crusaders, Jerusalem and the Noble Sanctuary have again fallen to a people of a different religious and cultural background in the form of the Jewish Israelis who claim sole religious and political rights to the city.

Occupying a state that is not all that dissimilar in size to the Crusader states of the 12\textsuperscript{th} century, the Israelis are perceived by bin Laden and most Arabs as having stolen the land of Palestine from Muslims just as the Christians had un成功fully attempted to do. This perception is exacerbated by the violence perpetrated upon Arab Palestinians by the Israelis militarily in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, which is reminiscent of the brutality visited upon Muslims by Christians during the Crusades. As a result of these similarities, it is unsurprising that the imagery and symbolism of the Crusades would be resurrected by bin Laden and applied to these modern circumstances. Whereas the liberation of Jerusalem was

\textsuperscript{54} Bruce Lawrence, \textit{Messages to the World}, 134.

\textsuperscript{55} Carole Hillenbrand, \textit{The Crusades: Islamic Perspectives}, 246
used as an important symbol in amassing support during the defensive jihad of Salah al-Din,\textsuperscript{56} bin Laden is similarly attempting to use the holy sites of the city as a rallying point for his modern defensive jihad against the “Judeo-Crusader Alliance.”\textsuperscript{57} Describing the occupation as a “disaster upon Jerusalem,”\textsuperscript{58} and accusing the Israelis of “planning to destroy the al-Aqsa mosque,”\textsuperscript{59} he is able to capitalize on the potent religious symbolism of these locations in order to garner support for a general defensive jihad against global unbelief. By identifying the Israelis as “an enemy [not] settled in his own original country fighting in its defense...but an attacking enemy,”\textsuperscript{60} who is allied with “Global unbelief and it’s leader America,”\textsuperscript{61} bin Laden is able to justify the declaration of a jihad in defense of the larger Islamic ummah from other civilizations.

Similarly, the presence of American troops in Saudi Arabia is perceived by bin Laden as an occupation of the Holy cities of the Hijaz,

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 246.

\textsuperscript{57} Bruce Lawrence, \textit{Messages to the World}, 25.

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 9.

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 164.

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 9.

\textsuperscript{61} Ibid., 146.
Mecca and Medina, providing him with further religious imagery without the necessity of historical precedence. Stating that “the Crusaders have managed to achieve their historic ambitions and dreams against our Islamic ummah, gaining control over the Islamic Holy Places and Holy Sanctuaries,” bin Laden interprets the Israeli and American forces as historical extensions of the Crusader armies of the 12th century, seeking to capture the Islamic holy places in the name of Western Christendom. This “calamity unprecedented in the history of our ummah” in the form of the occupation of the holiest shrines of Islam, represents for bin Laden the most striking proof of a “global alliance of evil” against the very foundations of Islam. The holy cities of Jerusalem and the Hijaz, more than anything else, are cultural symbols whose occupation by non-Muslims starkly reveals the imbalance of power between Islam and other civilizations. It is for this reason they become focal points, the most visible and symbolically significant acts of aggression that must be repelled if the

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62 It is important to note here that contrary to Osama bin Laden’s assertions, American troops have never occupied the Hijaz region of Saudi Arabia, where the holy cities of Mecca and Medina are located, but were stationed in the Eastern regions of Saudi Arabia, closer to the Persian Gulf, Kuwait, and Iraq.

63 Bruce Lawrence, Messages to the World, 16. Italics original.

64 Ibid., 15.

65 Ibid., 182.
"ummah is to regain “its pride and honor.” Their return to “Islamic sovereignty,” thus, has become one of the primary objectives for bin Laden, not only for religious purposes, but as a demonstration of the strength of the ummah, and its ability to defend itself from outside aggressors.

This imbalance in power and culture is also demonstrated in the paradigms of both Samuel Huntington and Osama bin Laden by ethnic and nationalist struggles along the edges of Islam in the modern period. Although they use the same historical examples, Huntington and bin Laden draw very different conclusions as to the cause and nature of the conflicts. Whereas Huntington relies primarily upon cultural and social forces to explain the violence, bin Laden incorporates the conflicts into the vision of a global Crusade that must be resisted everywhere. Stating that the overwhelming majority of conflicts “have taken place along the boundary looping across Eurasia and Africa that separates Muslims from non-Muslims,” Huntington suggests the greatest clash of cultures is occurring along the borders of Islam in the modern period. Identifying some of the conflicts between Muslims and non-Muslims as those being fought between

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66 Ibid., 14.

67 Ibid., 9.

68 Huntington, *Clash of Civilizations*, 255.
Arabs and Israelis, Indians and Pakistanis, Sudanese Muslims and Christians, and Lebanese Shi’ite Muslims and Maronite Christians, Huntington states that “Islam’s borders are bloody,” a phenomenon he attributes to social forces unleashed by both the resurgence of Islamic culture and the dramatic population explosion of Islamic societies.  

This population explosion caused by high birth rates, which has caused population growth in Islamic countries to exceed two percent annually, has, according to Huntington, inundated Islamic societies with young populations who contribute to instability within their own and neighboring societies. The natural expression of this instability, according to Huntington, is conflict along the borders of Islam as Islamic populations “push out” against the populations of other cultures. These demographic pressures, when coupled with historical and cultural enmities along civilizational borders, result in what Huntington terms as “Fault Line Wars.” Defined as “communal conflicts between states or groups from different civilizations” fault line wars go to the very root of the interplay between culture and power. When two populations from different cultures,

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69 Ibid., 254, 258. Italics removed.

70 Ibid., 117.

71 Ibid., 119.

72 Ibid., 252.
subjected to population pressures and identifying increasingly with their own cultural values, are presented with divisive issues such as who will yield political power, the likely outcome is a fault line conflict that is bloody and enduring. These conflicts, for Huntington, are a “product of difference”\(^{73}\) in which recognition of a difference in cultural values or ethnicity increases the likelihood of sparking a struggle for domination. This battle for domination is the primary theme of Huntington’s paradigm, in which civilizations attempt to safeguard their own values through domination of the others.

Whereas Huntington portrays somewhat negatively the population explosion of Islamic countries as being largely responsible for the conflicts along Islam’s cultural borders, bin Laden contends that it is not Muslims pushing out but non-Muslims pushing in that are the root cause of the conflicts. The conflicts in Palestine, Chechnya, Sudan, Kashmir, Bosnia, and the Philippines are all interpreted within bin Laden’s paradigm not as conflicts that have roots in the history of that particular region distinct from an overarching Islamic narrative, but simply as the result of aggression from the powers of “global unbelief”\(^{74}\) against the “Islamic nation.”\(^{75}\) The

\(^{73}\) Ibid., 210.

\(^{74}\) Bruce Lawrence, *Messages to the World*, 75.

\(^{75}\) Ibid., 134.
“genocidal war in Bosnia,” the “Jews violation of Palestine,” the destruction and slaughter being meted out to Muslims in Chechnya, and the Kashmiri Muslims that have been “tortured, slaughtered, killed, and raped” are but a few examples of this unchecked aggression bin Laden believes is being perpetrated by the world against Muslims. For bin Laden, “the recurrence of aggression against Muslims everywhere is proof enough” of a coordinated, global assault against the territorial integrity of the Islamic world. It is in this milieu, with Islam being assaulted from all directions, that the population explosion Huntington believes is the source of most of the violence is acknowledged by bin Laden not as a curse, but as a blessing. Describing young men between the ages of fifteen and twenty-five as the best suited for waging Jihad due to the fact that they have no family or working commitments, bin Laden views the youth bulge in Islamic societies to be a strength for the defense of those societies. Stating

76 Ibid., 136.

77 Ibid., 17.

78 Ibid.

79 Ibid., 136.


that “most of the Mujahidin are of this age,”82 bin Laden views the young
masses of Islam as a means by which the invaders can be repulsed and the
holy cities reclaimed. Their religious zeal, which he claims is the most
fervent during these years, however, has been wasted by the juridical
decrees and lies of the apostate governments who keep the Islamic ummah
“fettered”83 and unable to defend itself.84 By properly motivating the youth
of Islam to defensive Jihad, bin Laden hopes to redress the power imbalance
that exists between Islam and the forces of global unbelief that are
attacking “Muslims as if fighting over a bowl of food.”85

The primary reason for these conflicts, however, as stated by Samuel
Huntington and Osama bin Laden in different words is the lack of a core
state within Islam. Defining a core state as “the most powerful and
culturally central state or states”86 within a civilization, Huntington
suggests almost all civilizations, except Islam and Africa, have core states
that are able to impose order among its own civilization and negotiate with

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82 Ibid. Italics in original.
83 Ibid., 190.
84 Ibid., 190.
85 Ibid., 59.
86 Huntington, Clash of Civilizations, 135.
states from other civilizations on their behalf.\textsuperscript{87} Identifying China as the core state of the Sinic civilization, India as the core state of the Hindu civilization, and Russia as the core state of the Orthodox civilization, Huntington suggests Islam’s lack of a core state greatly increases the likelihood of communal conflict along its borders and state to state conflict in its interior.\textsuperscript{88} This lack of a core state within Islam is also bemoaned by bin Laden when he states that internal divisions have permitted enemies to invade the “land of our ummah, violate her honor, shed her blood and occupy her sanctuaries.”\textsuperscript{89} In the defense of Western civilization, this lack of a core state within Islam is both a benefit and a detriment. Whereas the rise of a militarily, economically, and culturally strong core state within Islam that has the legitimacy to command the loyalties of Muslims would likely be able to restrain the effects of the youth bulge within Islamic societies and prevent the development of violent conflicts on its borders, it would also be more than capable of militarily threatening the West and other civilizations. This ability of a core state to unilaterally impose a balance of power upon neighboring civilizations and particularly the West has certainly not been lost upon bin Laden. Stating that “this nation should

\textsuperscript{87} Ibid., 155-157.

\textsuperscript{88} Ibid., 264-265.

\textsuperscript{89} Bruce Lawrence, Messages to the World, 15.
establish the righteous caliphate,"90 bin Laden is in effect calling for the establishment of a core state politically and militarily capable of defending Muslims against the core states of other civilizations.

The paradigms of Samuel Huntington and Osama bin Laden, although rooted in a history of substantial conflict between Islam and the West, are intended to provide insight into political events of the present and future. As a result, their suggestions as to what course their respective civilizations should take in a world of competing and aggressive opposing civilizations provide the greatest insight into the natures of their respective paradigms. Relating directly to the global distribution of power among civilizations, Huntington’s paradigm attempts to maintain the current balance of power, while bin Laden’s directly challenges it. Huntington’s suggestions are largely in response to what he considers a “Sinic-Islamic alliance” and the broader implications of “the West and the Rest” tendency of international relations, whereas bin Laden’s are a response to the rise of global infidelity and the disunity of the Islamic ummah.

One of the primary themes of the paradigms of Samuel Huntington and Osama bin Laden is an obsession with the decay and renewal of their respective civilizations. For Huntington, this is evident in the declining military and political power of the West in relation to Islamic and Sinic

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90 Ibid., 121.
civilizations who are experiencing cultural resurgences. For bin Laden, this is evident in the military and cultural reversals symbolized by the occupation of the holy cities of the Arabian Peninsula and Jerusalem and the penetration of Western inspired secular legislation and institutions into Islamic societies. For both, their primary solutions involve the use of military force, but to very different ends. Huntington’s primary means of preventing Islamic and Sinic societies from challenging the West militarily or culturally is for the West to restrain their development of conventional and non-conventional military power so as to prevent them as much as possible from being in a position of strength in relation to Western civilization.\(^{91}\) Secondly, he advises the West to maintain technological and military superiority over other civilizations so as to maintain Western civilization as the leading global power.\(^{92}\) These actions are aimed largely at obstructing the progress of Sinic and Islamic civilizations from gaining weaponry that would enable them to gain any meaningful degree of military parity and is intended to maintain the dominance of Western civilization. In this way, Huntington’s paradigm is one of domination in which history and recent political events are perceived and interpreted as a means of

\(^{91}\) Huntington, *Clash of Civilizations*, 312.

\(^{92}\) Ibid.
maintaining Western civilization’s dominance over other civilizations that would challenge its power.

Bin Laden’s military options, however, rely almost entirely upon deterrence to preserve Islamic territorial integrity and prevent the corruption of Islamic culture by Western institutions and values. Stating that “every state and every civilization has to resort to terrorism under certain circumstances,” bin Laden emphasizes that such violence is conditional. Demanding that the United States “desist from aggressive intervention against Muslims in the whole world” and that “Western and American influence in our countries” end immediately, he is in essence demanding a balance of power between Islam and the West. Believing “reciprocal treatment is a part of justice,” bin Laden hopes to deter the West through a policy of reciprocity to accomplish “a balance in terror.” For bin Laden, there are two different kinds of reciprocity. The first involves reciprocity in the mode of killing, as evidenced in his statement “Just as you

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93 John Miller, *Frontline: Interview Osama Bin Laden.*


95 Ibid.

96 Ibid., 173.

97 Ibid., 114.
kill, so you shall be killed; just as you bomb, so you shall be bombed,”98 while the second is reciprocal in the targets of the violence as evidenced by his statement “Those who kill our women and our innocent, we kill their women and innocent, until they stop doing so.”99 These two different forms of reciprocity are an attempt to accomplish a meager means of deterrence against the superior military might of the West and other civilizations.

This emphasis on reciprocity and a balance of power also extends to the acquisition of nuclear weapons for bin Laden. Distinguishing the division of the world’s nuclear weapons along confessional lines, bin Laden is more than aware of Islam’s meager share. Considering the “hundreds of nuclear warheads and atomic bombs”100 possessed by Israel and acknowledging the fact that Christians control a “vast proportion of these weapons,”101 bin Laden states it is “a duty on Muslims to acquire them [nuclear weapons].”102 The acquisition and possession of nuclear weapons are the ultimate deterrent and this obviously has not been lost on bin Laden. Acts of violent reciprocity through acts of terrorism and

98 Ibid., 175.

99 Ibid., 119.

100 Ibid., 72.

101 Ibid.

102 Ibid.
encouragements to acquire nuclear weapons are attempts by bin Laden to deter the West and other civilizations from involvement and interference in Islamic affairs. In this way, bin Laden’s paradigm is one of deterrence, in which the symbolism of the successful Jihads of the Crusades are utilized in order to establish a balance of power with other civilizations in the present. This balance of power relies entirely upon the ability of Islam to visit reciprocal violence upon its enemies in a manner proportional to that which it received, which is why emphasis is placed upon striking at the enemy’s homeland, as occurred on September 11th, 2001 in the United States.

The paradigms of Samuel Huntington and Osama bin Laden also place a great deal of importance upon attaining greater unity within their own civilizations, so as to better resist attempts by the other to exploit divisions. Huntington advises greater political, economic, and military integration within Western civilization so as to better coordinate policies and encourages the “westernization” of civilizations such as Latin America that are similar enough to Western civilization to be easily integrated.\(^\text{103}\) Conversely, bin Laden calls for the overthrow of “Apostate rulers”\(^\text{104}\) who he

\(^{103}\) Huntington, *Clash of Civilizations*, 312.

\(^{104}\) Bruce Lawrence, *Messages to the World*, 10. Osama bin Laden identifies a wide range of Islamic rulers as apostates including Hosni Mubarak of Egypt, Bashir Assad of Syria, Saddam Hussein of Iraq, the presidents of Turkey, the last remaining Hashemite monarchy of Jordan, as well as the rulers of Saudi Arabia, who have all disobeyed the word of God by allying with the West or removing religion from state institutions.
claims have no authority over Muslims and urges Muslims to “prepare with all their might to repel the enemy in military, economic, missionary, and all other areas”\textsuperscript{105} in a manner reminiscent of total war, which requires the coordination that only a unified \textit{ummah} and restored caliphate can provide. Declaring, “we are all together in this”\textsuperscript{106} and “if we are silent what happened to Al-Andalus will happen to us,” bin Laden attempts to unite Muslims behind him by utilizing the imagery of one of Islam’s most disastrous military reversals.\textsuperscript{107}

\textbf{Conclusion}

The similarities and consistencies that exist between the paradigms of Samuel Huntington and Osama bin Laden, two individuals who are culturally and geographically distant from one another, regarding the “Clash of Civilizations” may certainly indicate the development of a renewed cultural awareness throughout the world. However, it is also important to recognize that significant differences exist between their respective paradigms. Although both of them perceive the “Clash of

\textsuperscript{105} Ibid., 42.

\textsuperscript{106} John Miller, \textit{Fronline: Interview Osama Bin Laden}.

\textsuperscript{107} Bruce Lawrence, \textit{Messages to the World}, 92.
Civilizations” as a modern political reality with which each individual civilization must contend, they differ significantly in how they regard the nature of the conflict. Huntington’s perception of the “Clash of Civilizations” is one of the forceful cultural and military reassertion of non-Western civilizations against Western preeminence and dominance in world affairs leads him to suggest solutions intended to maintain Western dominance for as long as possible. bin Laden’s perception of the “Clash of Civilizations” is primarily one of cultural survival and self defense in which he is much more concerned with attaining a balance of power than he is with domination of any other civilization. In this way their respective paradigms are like the opposite faces of a coin in which they both share the concept of the “Clash of Civilizations” at the center of their paradigms, but very different images of that conflict are etched onto the faces. Thus, one must be careful when comparing the paradigms of Osama bin Laden and Samuel Huntington for although their paradigms share broad similarities, they both see the world in very different ways with very different consequences for their respective civilizations.