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LOOKING THE WORLD IN THE EYE

Samuel Huntington is a mild-mannered man whose sharp opinions—about the collision of Islam and the West, about the role of the military in a liberal society, about what separates countries that work from countries that don't—have proved to be as prescient as they have been controversial. Huntington has been ridiculed and vilified, but in the decades ahead his view of the world will be the way it really looks

BY ROBERT D. KAPLAN

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I.

The most memorable review that [Samuel Phillips Huntington](#), the Albert J. Weatherhead III University Professor at Harvard, ever got was a bad one. "Imagine," Huntington recalled recently, sitting in his home on Boston's Beacon Hill. "The first review of my first book, and the reviewer compares me unfavorably to Mussolini." He blinked and squinted shyly through his eyeglasses. Huntington, seventy-four, speaks in a serene and nasal voice, the East Bronx modified by high Boston. He described how the reviewer, Matthew Josephson, writing in the left-wing opinion magazine *The Nation*, had ridiculed the militarism and "brutal sophistries" of *The Soldier and the State* and had sneered that Mussolini's sentiments had been similar though his words had more panache: "Believe, obey, fight!"

The review was published on April 6, 1957. The Cold War was scarcely a decade old. *The Soldier and the State* constituted a warning: America's liberal society, Huntington argued, required the protection of a professional military establishment steeped in conservative realism. In order to keep the peace, military leaders had to take for granted—and anticipate—the "irrationality, weakness, and evil in human nature." Liberals were good at reform, not at national security. "Magnificently varied and creative when limited to domestic issues," Huntington wrote, "liberalism faltered when applied to foreign policy and defense." Foreign policy, he explained, is not about the relationship among individuals living under the rule of law but about the relationship among states and other groups operating in a largely lawless realm. *The Soldier and the State* concluded with a rousing defense of West Point, which, Huntington wrote, "embodies the military ideal at its best ... a bit of Sparta in the midst of Babylon."

The book enraged many of Huntington's colleagues in Harvard's Department of Government, and the following year the department denied him tenure. With his close friend [Zbigniew Brzezinski](#) (whom Harvard also did not promote), Huntington went off to teach at Columbia University.

Four years later, in 1962, Harvard invited both Huntington and Brzezinski back, as tenured professors. Carl J. Friedrich, the German-born professor who had led the opposition to Huntington, met with him at Columbia. Friedrich talked of his admiration for the younger professor, until Huntington gently reminded him of his earlier hostility. It had become obvious to Friedrich and others that both Huntington and Brzezinski were rising stars in political science, and Harvard prided itself on its domination of the field. Brzezinski chose to stay at Columbia, but Huntington returned to Harvard, where he joined another rising star in the Department of Government, Henry A. Kissinger.

The Soldier and the State, now in its fourteenth printing, went on to become an academic classic. Telford Taylor, the chief American prosecutor at the Nuremberg trials, had this to say about the book when it was first published:

"Civilian control" [of the military] has become a piece of cant that politicians mouth worshipfully but with little understanding. This is an area where iconoclasm is badly needed; Professor Huntington's store of this commodity seems virtually inexhaustible, and it is refreshing to follow his trail of destructive exposure.

In recent decades scholarly commentary has focused less on one aspect of Huntington's book and more on another—less on the need for the military's sense of realism and more on the threat a military may pose to civilian authority. Because democracies lack the disciplined political cadres that dictatorships produce, they are especially prone to subtle manipulation by powerful militaries. The Founding Fathers, Huntington observed, while providing for a separation of powers within civilian government, did not foresee the potential encroachment on civilian government of a gigantic defense establishment over time.

The Soldier and the State initiated what has become a familiar pattern in Huntington's long career: his work has not immediately earned brilliant reviews and academic awards but, rather, has garnered mixed reviews and harsh denunciations that ultimately yield to widespread if grudging acceptance. Even Huntington's enemies unwittingly define and worry about the world in ways and in phrases that originated with Huntington. Roger Hilsman, a specialist on Southeast Asia and a Huntington critic, complained in 1957 that many parts of *The Soldier and the State* "are noisy with the sounds of sawing and stretching as the facts are forced into the bed that has been prepared for them." Well, maybe. Nonetheless, *The Soldier and the State* put the issue of civil-military relations on the map.

The subject that Huntington has more recently put on the map is the "clash of civilizations" that is occurring as Western, Islamic, and Asian systems of thought and government collide. His argument is more subtle than it is usually given credit for, but some of the main points can be summarized.

- The fact that the world is modernizing does not mean that it is Westernizing. The impact of urbanization and mass communications, coupled with poverty and ethnic divisions, will not lead to peoples' everywhere thinking as we do.
- Asia, despite its ups and downs, is expanding militarily and economically. Islam is exploding demographically. The West may be declining in relative influence.
- Culture-consciousness is getting stronger, not weaker, and states or peoples may band together because of cultural similarities rather than because of ideological ones, as in the past.
- The Western belief that parliamentary democracy and free markets are suitable for everyone will bring the West into conflict with civilizations—notably, Islam and the Chinese—that think differently.
- In a multi-polar world based loosely on civilizations rather than on ideologies, Americans must reaffirm their Western identity.

The terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon highlight the tragic relevance not just of Huntington's ideas about a clash of civilizations but of his entire life's work. Since the 1950s he has argued that American society requires military and intelligence services that think in the most tragic, pessimistic terms. He has worried for decades about how American security has mostly been the result of sheer luck—the luck of geography—and may one day have to be truly earned. He has written that liberalism thrives only when security can be taken for granted—and that in the future we may not have that luxury. And he has warned that the West may one day have to fight for its most cherished values and, indeed, physical survival against extremists from other cultures who despise our country and who will embroil us in a civilizational war that is real, even if political leaders and polite punditry must call it by another name. While others who hold such views have found both happiness and favor working among

From the archives:

"Was Democracy Just a Moment?" (December 1997)

The global triumph of democracy was to be the glorious climax of the American Century. But democracy may not be the system that will best serve the world—or even the one that will prevail in places that now consider themselves bastions of freedom. By Robert D. Kaplan

"Colonel Dunlap's Coup" (January 1993)

A fictionalized essay that has been circulating within the Pentagon offers a blunt warning on several fronts. By Thomas E. Ricks

"Jihad vs. McWorld" (March 1992)

The two axial principles of our age—tribalism and globalism—clash at every point except one: they may both be threatening to democracy. By Benjamin R. Barber

like-minded thinkers in the worlds of the corporation, the military, and the intelligence services, Huntington has deliberately remained in the liberal bastion of Ivy League academia, to fight for his ideas on that lonely but vital front.

II.

The history of the intellectual battles surrounding American foreign policy since the early Cold War can be told, to an impressive degree, through Huntington's seventeen books and scores of articles. Kissinger and Brzezinski have also produced distinguished works of scholarship, but these men will be remembered principally for their service in government—Kissinger as National Security Advisor under Richard Nixon and Secretary of State under Nixon and Gerald Ford, and Brzezinski as National Security Advisor under Jimmy Carter. Huntington, though he served briefly in the Administrations of Lyndon Johnson and Carter, is a man of the academy to a far greater extent than his two friends. His ideas emerge from seminars and lectures, not from sudden epiphanies. If he couldn't teach, he probably couldn't write. And unlike many professors, he values his undergraduate students more than he does his graduate students. Graduate students, he told me, "are more reluctant to challenge this or that professor" and have often been "captured by the jargon and orthodoxy of the discipline."

One of his former undergraduates observes, "Other academics want to ram down your throat what they know, and then go on to the next victim. Huntington never dominates classroom discussions, and he listens intensely." Huntington disdains "rational-choice theory," the reigning fad in political science, which assumes that human behavior is predictable but which fails to take account of fear, envy, hatred, self-sacrifice, and other human passions that are essential to an understanding of politics. In an age of academic operators he is an old-fashioned teacher who speculates historically and philosophically on the human condition. His former students include [Francis Fukuyama](#), the author of the famous post-Cold War anthem *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992), and [Fareed Zakaria](#), the former managing editor of *Foreign Affairs* and the current editor of *Newsweek International*.

You aren't likely to see Huntington on C-SPAN, let alone on *The McLaughlin Group*. He is a worse than indifferent public speaker: hunched over, reading laboriously from a text. His status and reputation have come the hard way: through writing books that, though often publicly denounced, have had a pervasive influence among people who count. Although he is the classic insider (a former president of the American Political Science Association and a co-founder of *Foreign Policy* magazine), he writes as an outsider, someone willing to enrage the very experts who will ultimately judge him. "If a scholar has nothing new to say he should keep quiet," Huntington wrote in 1959. "The quest for truths is synonymous with intellectual controversy."

In many ways Samuel Huntington represents a dying breed: someone who combines liberal ideals with a deeply conservative understanding of history and foreign policy. Huntington is a lifelong Democrat. He was a speechwriter for Adlai Stevenson in the 1950s (and met his wife, Nancy, during the 1956 campaign), a foreign-policy adviser to Hubert Humphrey in the 1960s, and one of the authors of Jimmy Carter's speeches on human rights in the 1970s. This same Huntington, though, is the founder of Harvard's [John M. Olin Institute for Strategic Studies](#), a redoubt of foreign-policy realism that has been financed by a triad of conservative philanthropies: the John M. Olin Foundation, the Smith Richardson Foundation, and the Bradley Foundation.

When I suggested to Huntington that he is "an old-fashioned Democrat, the kind that no longer exists," he indulged in a rare display of emotional animation. He snapped in reply, "That's it—that's what I am. As Arthur Schlesinger would say, I am a child of Niebuhr." Reinhold Niebuhr was the leading Protestant theologian of twentieth-century America—a devout Christian who believed that men are sufficiently wicked to require tough methods for the preservation of order. Huntington, an Episcopalian, was attracted to what he describes as Niebuhr's "compelling combination of morality and practical realism." Though an ardent Cold Warrior, Niebuhr never succumbed to moral triumphalism, believing that history was more profoundly characterized by irony than by progress. Even if the United States were to win the Cold War, Niebuhr wrote in 1952, this outcome might only cause the nation to overextend itself, dissipating its

power in an excess of righteousness. Niebuhr's tragic sensibility constitutes a thread connecting all of Huntington's major works. It is the key to Huntington's definition of conservatism.

In the June, 1957, edition of *The American Political Science Review*, Huntington published a monograph titled "Conservatism as an Ideology." Liberalism, he wrote, is an ideology of individualism, free markets, liberty, and the rule of law. "Classic conservatism," in contrast, has no particular vision: it is a rationale, "high and necessary," for ensuring the survival of liberal institutions. Conservatism, Huntington observed, is the "rational defense of being against mind, of order against chaos." In England, he explained, Edmund Burke mounted a conservative defense of a "commercial society and a moderate, liberal constitution." Real conservatism is about conserving what is, rather than crusading abroad for what is not or proposing radical changes at home. In the United States, Federalists like John Adams and Alexander Hamilton expounded conservative principles to defend a liberal constitution. "The American political genius," Huntington wrote, "is manifest not in our ideas but in our institutions." And in his view, "The greatest need is not so much the creation of more liberal institutions as the successful defense of those which already exist."

III.

Samuel Huntington was born in 1927 in New York City and grew up in middle-class housing projects in the Astoria section of Queens and in the East Bronx. He was the only child of Richard Thomas Huntington, a publisher of hotel trade journals, and Dorothy Sanborn Phillips, a short-story writer, and he was the grandson of John Sanborn Phillips, the co-editor of the muckraking magazine *McClure's*. Huntington was a prodigy. He went to Yale from Peter Stuyvesant High School at age sixteen and graduated with "exceptional distinction" after two and a half years. He served in the U.S. Army and then earned a master's degree in political science from the University of Chicago and a Ph.D. from Harvard. He believes that the strain of writing his Ph.D. dissertation over the course of four grueling months in 1950 is what precipitated the diabetes he suffers, which has necessitated six daily blood tests and three daily insulin injections ever since. (He interrupted our conversation to test his blood-sugar level and to jab himself with a syringe. After looking at the blood-sugar number, he said, "Good, I can have a salad and a glass of wine for lunch.") His doctoral dissertation, "Clientalism," carried on in the muckraking tradition of his grandfather. It described how federal agencies, notably the Interstate Commerce Commission, get taken over by the very industries that they are supposed to regulate. "We were all liberals, and Franklin Roosevelt was God," Huntington told me. "I couldn't imagine that anyone thought differently." Psychologically, Huntington's world at this time bore the imprint of the New Deal. Still, Harvard manifested an occasional irregularity. "There was one student who vigorously opposed collective bargaining, the minimum wage—all the conventional wisdom, in fact. It was quite a shock for all of us." This student, William Rehnquist, eventually left for Stanford Law School.

Two towering intellectual figures then ruled Harvard's Department of Government: Carl Friedrich and William Yandell Elliott. Friedrich, the more liberal of the two, had helped to write the constitution for the Federal Republic of Germany (that is, the old West Germany). Huntington gravitated toward Elliott, an Oxford-educated southerner and a conservative philosopher with much experience in Washington. Elliott believed in a vigorous stance against the Soviet Union and loathed moral relativism. "Elliott would travel to Cambridge once a week from Washington to meet with his graduate students," Huntington recalled. Among those profoundly influenced by Elliott was Huntington's contemporary Henry Kissinger. "We would wait in [Elliott's] outer office as the minutes went by, incensed that he was running late because of the time he took mentoring this one student, whom Elliott had identified as showing particular promise. Then the door would open and this chubby student would walk out." Kissinger dedicated his first book to Elliott: *A World Restored* (1957), which described Metternich's creation of a stable, post-Napoleonic world order. "Elliott was no great theorist," Kissinger told me, "but a good teacher is someone who sees talents in you that you didn't know you had. After I had written a paper on Kant, Elliott told me, 'You have a fine mind, but now you have to read novelists, like Dostoyevsky.' And so I read Dostoyevsky. This is how he helped his students grow."

Sweeping and icy statements dominate Huntington's books. These blunt judgments contrast sharply with

Huntington's unimposing physical presence and unaffected demeanor. He looks like a character from a John Cheever story, someone you might forget that you had ever met. He blinks. He plays nervously with keys. He is balding, and stares intently at his palms as he talks. The fragile exterior conceals a flinty core. "Sam is very shy," Brzezinski says. "He's not one of those guys who can shoot the breeze at a bar. But get him into a debate and he is confident and tenacious." A former student says, "Sam is a geek with a backbone of steel." Another of his students demurs: "Sam isn't a geek. He's a quintessential Victorian man of honor—very quiet and contained, yet extraordinarily tough when the occasion demands."

In the early 1980s, walking home one night from a Cambridge dinner party with his wife and Francis Keppel, the retired dean of the Harvard Graduate School of Education, Huntington was approached by three young men who demanded his money. "What?" Huntington asked. "We're not fucking around, we want your cash," one of the young men said before attacking him. Huntington repulsed him and wrestled him to the ground, calling for help. Then he took on a second, who was on top of Keppel. Ultimately the three men ran off. Huntington did not volunteer this story: I learned about it from one of his former students, and then had to get the details from Nancy. When I asked Huntington himself about it, he said, "A week before there had been an article in one of the newsmagazines recommending that you shouldn't fight with a mugger. But my immediate impulse was to fight back."

IV.

From the outset Huntington's thinking has been focused on the big issues of the modern world; he was always interested in applying intellectual rigor to real-life concerns. Henry Kissinger's first book was largely inspired by early-nineteenth-century European history. Huntington's first book was inspired by what was going on in America when he was a graduate student. As Robert D. Putnam, of Harvard, has written in an essay on Huntington, *The Soldier and the State* was inspired by President Harry Truman's firing of General Douglas MacArthur for insubordination, in 1951. MacArthur's political generalship had disturbed Huntington, in part because it undermined the idea of a professional military. The military—and the U.S. Senate, another conservative institution—would later prove to be the most effective bulwarks against Senator Joseph McCarthy's assault on America's liberal values. *The Soldier and the State* was no apologia for militarism, as some simplistic critiques have claimed, but, rather, a penetrating analysis of the relationship between the military and society.

The most telling passage in *The Soldier and the State* is in the preface, where the twenty-nine-year-old Huntington came to a conclusion that formed the template of an entire career. On the one hand, he conceded that "actual personalities, institutions, and beliefs do not fit into neat logical categories." But on the other, he argued passionately that "neat logical categories are necessary if man is to think profitably about the real world in which he lives and to derive from it lessons for broader application and use." A scholar, in order to say anything significant, is "forced to generalize." The true measure of a theory is not that it accounts for all the relevant facts but that it accounts for those facts "better than any other theory." Without abstraction and simplification there can be no understanding, Huntington maintained. Those who concentrate on the imperfections of a theory, without coming up with a better alternative, are helping no one. Thus begins a book of relentless, empirical generalizations.

From the end of the War of 1812 through the attack on Pearl Harbor, Huntington wrote, Americans had little reason to worry about foreign threats. National security was taken for granted—an inheritance of geographical circumstance, rather than a creation of wise policy. With neither security nor economic expansion on a resource-rich continent in doubt, the liberal ideology that Americans acquired from their English forebears could be firmly established without contradiction. In the absence of any threat to the nation's liberal institutions, there was little need to defend them, and thus little need for real conservatism. Conservatives like Hamilton and Adams could thrive only because during the first years of the Republic it was surrounded by French, English, and Spanish territory, and was hampered by the British fleet. But for many decades thereafter no foreign threats existed on any significant scale, and the "low view of man" cultivated by conservatives entered a state of dormancy. Indeed, when President Woodrow Wilson read in the *Baltimore Sun* in 1915 that his general staff was preparing pragmatically for the possibility of war with Germany, he was "trembling and white with passion," and insisted to his aides that if the story was

true, the staff officers should be fired. "Liberalism," Huntington observed, "does not understand and is hostile to military institutions and the military function."

Of course, the early twentieth century did witness a brief rebirth of Hamiltonian realism and interventionism, identified with the aggressive foreign policy of President Theodore Roosevelt. But the aversion to power politics was so deeply ingrained in the American psyche that Wilson's foreign-policy failures in the aftermath of World War I led to "abandoning intervention altogether and returning to liberal isolationism." With no one left to carry the torch of Hamilton, whose realist philosophy could reconcile the military to the rest of society, the American military in the interwar period withdrew into itself. It did so just as it was undergoing intensive professionalization and specialization, near the climax of the Industrial Revolution.

Huntington reminded us that the modern officer is a professional, whose job is the management of violence and whose client is the state. Although war is as old as humankind, a professional military essentially began with the Napoleonic Wars. The Founding Fathers put their uniforms on and off as the occasion demanded, and saw little distinction between soldiers and civilians. The Constitution does not provide for "objective civilian control" of government, which came about, again, because of the accident of geography: without a foreign threat, our standing army long remained small and politically weak, and could be reduced in size after every war. But the advance of technology that culminated in World War II, with Pearl Harbor and the atomic bomb, meant that geography was no longer a barrier. Security might at times have to take precedence over liberal values.

The liberal values that a democracy holds dear, Huntington explained, are also the values that can undermine a professional officer corps. "The heart of liberalism is individualism," he wrote. "It emphasizes the reason and moral dignity of the individual." But the military man, because of the nature of his job, has to assume irrationality and the permanence of violent conflict in human relations. "The liberal glorifies self-expression" because the liberal takes national security for granted; the military man glorifies "obedience" because he does not take that security for granted. A democracy may fight better than a dictatorship, because its middle-level officers are more inclined to make risky decisions; that is one reason for our success on the beaches of Normandy, and for the success of the Israelis over Arab armies. Nevertheless, a truly liberal military would lack the lethal effectiveness required to defend a liberal society threatened by technologically empowered illiberal adversaries.

Only conservatism, Huntington argued, proves properly conducive to military professionalism. Indeed, conservatism grows organically out of the military ethic that dominated society in ancient times. Conservatism recognizes the primacy of power in international affairs; it accepts existing institutions; and its goals are limited. It eschews grand designs, because it has no universal value system that it seeks to impose on others. The conservative mind, like the military one, believes that human beings learn only from human experience, which leads to an accent on the study of history. History forms the centerpiece of war-college curricula.

But don't assume, Huntington said, that the conservatism of the military is inherently reactionary, in an ideological sense. In nineteenth-century Europe the professionalization of militaries allowed men of all backgrounds to advance in the ranks; militaries challenged the aristocratic basis of society. In egalitarian America the dynamic between the military and society was bound to be different. The United States was already democratic, and under no threat. The military was more isolated, and over time it developed an ethos that was markedly more aristocratic than that of society. The more a liberal society isolates and reproaches the military, Huntington implied, the more conservative the military may become in response.

Now here is where the young Huntington really got interesting. Our very greatness, he said, is what makes it difficult for the American liberal mind to deal with the outside world. "American nationalism," he wrote, "has been an idealistic nationalism, justified, not by the assertion of the superiority of the American people over other peoples, but by the assertion of the superiority of American ideals over other

From the archives:

"Four-Star Generalists" (October 1999)

Military history pierces the philosophical fog that often surrounds the other humanities. By Robert D. Kaplan

ideals." French foreign policy can be whatever the French decide it is, provided it is in their momentary self-interest. But American foreign policy is judged by the criteria of universal principles. According to Huntington, this leads to a pacifist strain in American liberalism when it comes to defending our hard-core national interests, and an aggressive strain when it comes to defending human rights. Although the professional soldier accepts the reality of never-ending and limited conflict, "the liberal tendency," Huntington explained, is "to absolutize and dichotomize war and peace." Liberals will most readily support a war if they can turn it into a crusade for advancing humanistic ideals. That is why, he wrote, liberals seek to reduce the defense budget even as they periodically demand an adventurous foreign policy. It came as no surprise to readers of *The Soldier and the State* that the same intellectuals and opinion-makers who consistently underappreciated NATO in the 1970s and 1980s, when the outcome of the Cold War remained in doubt, demanded aggressive NATO involvement in the 1990s, in Bosnia and Kosovo, when the stakes for our national security were much lower, but the assault on liberal principles was vivid and clear-cut.

The only way to preserve a liberal society, Huntington wrote, is to define the limits of military control. And the only way to do that across the uncertain decades and centuries ahead is to keep the military and the advice it offers strictly professional. Therefore, a soldier should recommend battle only in the case of national interest. If he is to fight for other reasons, even humanitarian ones, the pressure to do so must come from his civilian superiors.

In 1993 General Colin Powell, then the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, expressed opposition to U.S. military involvement in Bosnia and was branded a "political general" by some. But a reader of Huntington might think a little differently about Powell. If his client's territory is under no direct danger, the professional officer cannot recommend "the involvement of the state in war except when victory is certain," as Huntington wrote. Powell's opposition to war in a case where the impact on our national interest was inconclusive and where victory appeared unsure was not so much a "Powell doctrine" as it was the age-old dictum of the military professional, who seeks to avoid becoming "political" and refuses to promote moral crusades, however justified they may be. (Of course, the military's ability to intimidate our civilian leadership into inaction in Bosnia points up Huntington's other realization: about how democracies are encroached on by overbearing defense establishments.)

The first decade of the Cold War indicated to Huntington that although tension would persist between a liberal society and a vast new defense establishment, the two would find ways to coexist. He saw Truman as a harbinger of this emerging order: liberal at home, but profoundly conservative in foreign affairs. It was the civilian business community, Huntington observed, that was now providing a bridge between the military and the rest of society. For many of us, big business embodies conservative pragmatism and what is known as the military-industrial complex. But Huntington exposed this image as a Cold War artifact. "Business pacifism" is how he describes the capitalist's view of the world through most of our earlier history. Religious moralism and economic liberalism combined to make most American businessmen see international trade and multilateral treaties as more important than power politics. The end of the Cold War has revived that view of the world. Liberals and neoconservatives who now worry about the American business community's growing economic involvement with an authoritarian China are revisiting an old Huntington argument.

V.

By the mid-1960s Samuel Huntington had settled into the life of a Harvard professor, quietly raising a family in the Boston area. This life was briefly interrupted by an assignment for the Johnson Administration in 1967: as a State Department consultant, he prepared a 100-page report on the Vietnam War that was later declassified and used as the basis for an article in the July, 1968, issue of *Foreign Affairs*. The article caused a tremendous furor. It embraced the Administration's objective of defeating the North Vietnamese, but explained why the Administration's methods for achieving that objective were all wrong.

Huntington rejected the significance of the Johnson Administration's claim that the proportion of the

South Vietnamese population under government control (rather than under Viet Cong control) had risen from 40 percent to 60 percent. "This change," he wrote, is "the result of the movement of the population into the cities rather than the extension of the Government's control into the countryside"—where the Viet Cong were as strong as ever. But although the Johnson Administration was guilty of "unwarranted optimism," the critics of the Administration, he asserted, were guilty of "misplaced moralism." Huntington pointed out that the question *Whom does the majority of the population really support?* was relevant only in a stable constitutional democracy like America's, not amid the mounting chaos and violence of a country like Vietnam. Further, winning popular support by promoting rural development would achieve nothing; it wasn't rural poverty that drove people into the arms of the Viet Cong but, rather, "the absence of an effective structure of authority." And where such a strong authority existed, Huntington wrote, "even though it be quite hierarchical and undemocratic, the Viet Cong make little progress." The one third of the rural population that had withstood Viet Cong infiltration had done so because of tough ethnic and religious communal organizations that were often as inimical to Western values as the Viet Cong were. "Even back then we were nation-building," Huntington told me, with disapproval. "We rejected religious and ethnic loyalties as counterweights to the Viet Cong because we wanted a modern, democratic nation-state with a national army. One problem with Vietnam was our idealism."

Such idealism, he says, now characterizes other American involvements overseas: "The media appeal to our national egotism, which assumes our values and political structures are those the rest of the world wants; and if it doesn't want them, it ought to." Huntington believes that we should proclaim our values abroad in ways that allow us to take advantage of our adversaries but do not force us to remake societies from within. Thus in the late 1970s he helped Zbigniew Brzezinski and Jimmy Carter to implement a human-rights policy designed to embarrass the Soviet Union, but he has remained skeptical about putting troops on the ground to build Western-style democracy in places with no tradition of it.

Huntington's analysis of Vietnam derived from his newly emerging world view. In the 1950s and 1960s the big issue in social science was political modernization. The conventional academic wisdom was that new countries in Africa and elsewhere would develop democracies and legal systems similar to ours. Huntington would have none of this. His insight about Vietnam—that the kind of authority that worked there was not at all like ours—fit into the larger theme elaborated in his book *Political Order in Changing Societies* (1968). *Political Order* is a study of how states are formed, and perhaps Huntington's most important book. In the fourteenth century the Arab historian Ibn Khaldun described in his *Muqaddimah* how desert nomads, in aspiring to the comforts of a sedentary life, created the dynamic for urbanization that was then captured by powerful dynasties. Huntington continued the story. He described how development leads to new patterns of instability, including upheavals and revolutions, which result in the building of more-complex institutions. *Political Order in Changing Societies*, though written three and a half decades ago, is still the clearest road map to what developing countries face in their attempts to establish stable and responsive governments in an era of globalization. The book opens with a bold assertion.

The most important political distinction among countries concerns not their form of government but their degree of government. The differences between democracy and dictatorship are less than the differences between those countries whose politics embodies consensus, community, legitimacy, organization, effectiveness, [and] stability, and those countries whose politics is deficient in these qualities.

The statement that the distinction between democracies and dictatorships is less important than it seems will come as no surprise to those who have experienced the social chaos in, say, Nigeria and Ghana, despite the elections that those countries hold, and have also experienced the relative openness and civil stability of more-autocratic societies such as Jordan, Tunisia, and Singapore. More than other academics, Huntington pays attention to ground-level realities. Throughout his career he has displayed an academically atypical fondness for quoting on-the-scene observers (as well as academics) in his footnotes. "There are no academic sources for recent events," he told me. "There is only academic

opinion."

The central argument in *Political Order* is that despite what we may instinctively believe, the American historical experience is inappropriate for understanding the challenges that developing countries face.

"Americans believe in the unity of goodness," Huntington wrote. They "assume that all good things go together"—social progress, economic growth, political stability, and so on. But consider India, he suggested.

India had one tenth the per capita income of Argentina and Venezuela in the 1950s, yet it was politically more stable. Why? Part of the answer is

something "bad": India's illiteracy. Illiteracy in India fostered democratic stability, because rural illiterates make fewer demands on government than a newly literate urban proletariat. Illiterates or semi-literates merely vote; literate people organize, and challenge the existing system. India, Huntington contended, was stable and democratic for decades despite its poverty because of an unusual combination of factors: a poorly educated electorate and a highly educated elite large enough to administer modern governmental institutions. Now that a newly literate lower-middle class is emerging in India, the nation's politics have become far nastier.

Another problem for American thinking, Huntington continued, is that our history has taught us how to limit government, not how to build it from scratch. Just as our security, a product of geography, was largely unearned, so were our governing institutions and practices, an inheritance from seventeenth-century England. The Constitution is about controlling authority; throughout Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the formerly communist world the difficulty is to establish authority. "The problem," Huntington wrote, "is not to hold elections but to create organizations."

In politically advanced states loyalty is to institutions, not to groups. States like ours are the result of a long process of urbanization and enlightenment, but this process can be destabilizing in its own right. "The faster the enlightenment of the population, the more frequent the overthrow of the government," he observed. The French and Mexican Revolutions were preceded not by poverty but by sustained social and economic development. The economic growth that the global elite now champions around the world will lead to instability and upheaval before it leads to politically advanced societies.

At international conferences experts frequently wring their hands about corruption. *Political Order* demonstrates that the very modernization they champion causes corruption in the first place. The eighteenth century saw unprecedented levels of corruption in England, owing to the onset of the Industrial Revolution; the same can be said of nineteenth-century America. But corruption at this stage of development can be useful, Huntington wrote, and should not be high-mindedly disparaged. Corruption provides the means for assimilating new groups into the system. The selling of parliamentary seats, for example, is typical of an emerging democracy, and preferable to armed attacks against Parliament itself. Corruption, Huntington pointed out, is a less extreme form of alienation than violence: "He who corrupts a system's police officers is more likely to identify with the system than he who storms the system's police stations." In late-nineteenth-century America legislatures and city councils were corrupted by utilities, railway companies, and new industrial corporations—the same forces that were spurring economic growth and helping to make the United States a world power. In India many economic activities would be paralyzed without *baksheesh*. Corruption in moderate doses can overcome unresponsive bureaucracy and be an instrument of progress.

At the same time, Huntington explained, the hurly-burly of modernization and corruption invites a puritanical reaction. The seamy trade-offs necessary for growth and stability are denounced by zealots, delegitimizing the political process. This happened in Iran a decade after *Political Order* was published.

The United States, Huntington said, has trouble understanding revolutionary ferment in the rest of the world because it never experienced a real revolution. Instead it went through a war of independence—and not even one "of natives against alien conquerors," like that of the Algerians against the French, but one of settlers against the home country. Real revolutions are different—bad—Huntington made clear.

From the archives:

"Poor But Prosperous"

(September 1998)

Development and quality of life can't always be measured purely in economic terms. The Indian state of Kerala is a case in point. By Akash Kapur

Fortunately, they are rare. Even as the proletariat in Third World slums continues to radicalize, the middle classes become increasingly conservative and more willing to fight for the existing order. Writing in the late 1960s, Huntington was describing the world of the early twenty-first century. When a revolution does occur, continued economic deprivation "may well be essential to its success." The idea that food shortages and other hardships caused by economic sanctions will lead to the overthrow of a revolutionary regime like Saddam Hussein's or Fidel Castro's is nonsense, in Huntington's view. Material sacrifices, although intolerable in a normal situation, are proof of ideological commitment in a revolutionary one: "Revolutionary governments may be undermined by affluence; but they are never overthrown by poverty." The Spanish and Canadian developers now building hotels in Havana may know better than the American government does how to undermine a revolutionary regime.

Huntington portrayed the problem of revolutions, monarchies, praetorian regimes, and feudal states by drawing on a wealth of examples from all over the world. He offered a panorama of the messiness, intractability, and complexity of our times, even as he efficiently distilled and summarized. In one sentence (in *Political Order*) he laid out the different roles played by militaries throughout the twentieth century: "In the world of oligarchy, the soldier is a radical; in the middle class world, he is a participant and arbiter; as the mass society looms ... he becomes the conservative guardian of the existing order." A better description of the changing role of the Turkish army over the decades, or of the evolving status of the Egyptian army, has never been written. Indeed, the more backward the society, the more progressive the role of the military may be—and the more cautious the West should be about wanting to replace it with civilian politicians.

America's confidence in "democratic" reform for its own sake is misplaced. "Reform can be a catalyst of revolution," Huntington wrote, "rather than a substitute for it ... great revolutions have followed periods of reform, not periods of stagnation and repression." In any case, reform in underdeveloped societies is effected not by transparency and greater public participation but, as Mustafa Kemal Atatürk showed in Turkey, by "celerity and surprise—those two ancient principles of war." If a reform program is revealed gradually, a free press will dissect it and create opposition to it. Because one sector of society will support one reform but not another, a reformer must work by stealth, isolating one set of issues from the next, and often relying not on the media but on the gaps in communication that exist within a society.

But mass communications work their own magic, as Huntington admitted in a long coda to *Political Order* that he published later, *The Third Wave* (1991). This book, subtitled "Democratization in the Late 20th Century," has been called "universalist and militantly pro-democracy" by the French scholar and otherwise harsh Huntington critic Pierre Hassner. Huntington has always been a liberal, but one who refuses to retreat into easy platitudes for the sake of a carefully constructed reputation. His books illustrate what academic tenure is supposed to be about but often isn't: the freedom, provided by occupational security, to express views that are (at least in the academy) unpopular, unconventional, unwelcome, and bold.

VI.

The 1960s presented Huntington with some trying moments. He was followed through Harvard Yard by chanting demonstrators, who had read in the *Harvard Crimson* about his association with the Johnson Administration. The Center for International Affairs, where Huntington worked, was occupied and then fire-bombed. Huntington's young son awoke one morning to find the words "War Criminal Lives Here" painted on the front door.

Huntington was not deterred from further government service. As noted, he joined the Carter Administration, and helped President Carter to craft a foreign policy that was an expression of our human-rights ideals. This was not a matter of soft sanctimony but a hard-edged tool that posed severe political problems for the Soviets. As the coordinator for security planning, a job created for him by Brzezinski, Carter's National Security Advisor, Huntington also wrote "Presidential Directive 18," a comprehensive overview of U.S.-Soviet relations that helped to galvanize the National Security Council against accommodation with Moscow. At a time when pessimism was widespread, after Soviet advances

in Angola and Ethiopia, and with leftist Third World majorities dominating the United Nations, Huntington created a battalion of task forces to evaluate where the Soviets and the Americans stood with regard to weapons production, intelligence gathering, economics, diplomacy, and other areas. He and his team concluded that the Soviet advantage was temporary, and that the West would eventually move out ahead. They strongly recommended that the United States commence a military buildup and create a Persian Gulf rapid-reaction force. The last two years of Carter's presidency and the eight years of Ronald Reagan's presidency would see those recommendations become reality.

Only in 1981 did Huntington get around to publishing a book about the 1960s, *American Politics: The Promise of Disharmony*. Most generations in history have been organizational ones, preferring to motor along in their daily grooves, directed by others. Why, Huntington asked, are some generations different? His answer was that the 1960s constituted a "creedal passion period," something that erupts every few generations in Anglo-Saxon culture, and has its roots in England's seventeenth-century Civil War; the New World experienced something similar in the Protestant Great Awakening of the 1740s. Despite all the drugs and sex, Huntington viewed the 1960s demonstrators as essentially Puritans, upset that our institutions were not living up to our ideals. It is the very promise of those ideals—which cannot possibly be fulfilled in any age—that accounts for the "central agony" in American politics.

Like America in the 1950s and 1960s, early-seventeenth-century England was in the throes of rapid economic development and social change—even as the peers and the gentry became frustrated with an increasingly impersonal government. The result was a Puritan uprising against the Crown in the hopes of erecting a morality-based society. It culminated in the conservative Restoration. The Great Awakening, a century later, was another Puritan revival, as American evangelicals, imbued with pioneer optimism and impatient with the status quo, fanned out over New England in a contest for souls.

The Great Awakening, Huntington wrote, "bequeathed to the American people the belief that they were engaged in a righteous effort to insure the triumph of good over evil"—which resulted in what Huntington and others called the American Creed. The creed became the touchstone of our national identity, because for the first few decades of our country's history there was little else to separate us from our English cousins. Allegiance to the creed would allow one generation of immigrants after another to Americanize rapidly while retaining elements of their ethnic cultures. Unlike other national creeds, ours is universalistic, democratic, egalitarian, and individualistic. The Jacksonian age of the 1820s and 1830s was a creedal-passion period, and so were the Populist-Progressive years at the turn of the twentieth century.

"Opposition to power, and suspicion of government as the most dangerous embodiment of power, are the central themes of American political thought," Huntington wrote. And it is true: just look at our extremist groups. Whereas both the right and the left in Europe have traditionally favored a strong state, both right-wing and left-wing radicals in America have always demanded more "popular control." Indeed, the very institutions required to deal with foreign enemies were excoriated by the 1960s militants. "The arrogance of power was superseded by the arrogance of morality," Huntington wrote. The Old Left was identified with the working class and the labor unions, but the New Left "eschewed the working class and stressed moralism rather than ideology." The New Left, explained a leader of the Students for a Democratic Society whom Huntington quoted, "begins from moral values, which are held as absolute"—Puritanism in its most unadulterated form.

The aftermath of creedal passion is cynical indifference followed by the return of conservatism; creedal passion holds government and society to standards that they simply cannot meet. Nevertheless, Huntington believes, creedal passion is at the core of America's greatness. By holding officials and institutions to impossible standards in a way no other country does, the United States has periodically reinvented itself through evolution rather than revolution. What will the next creedal-passion period be about? "Power is now seen as corporate. So the next outburst of creedal passion may be against hegemonic corporate capitalism."

VII.

The early 1990s were a time of optimism and even triumphalism in the West. The Cold War had just been won. Neoconservatives assumed that democratic elections and the unleashing of market forces would improve life everywhere. Liberals assumed that power politics and huge defense budgets were relics of the past. News stories heralded the growing clout and effectiveness of the United Nations. A new transnational elite was emerging, composed of prominent academics and business leaders who believed that the world was on the verge of creating a truly global culture.

Then Samuel Huntington published an article titled "The Clash of Civilizations?" The article, which appeared in *Foreign Affairs* in 1993, was partly conceived in one of Huntington's seminars, where the paradigm of a world unified by globalization was challenged in classroom discussion. There was little evidence that any sort of universal civilization existed outside the confines of a small, highly educated elite. The fact that the United States and China, for example, could communicate with each other more easily did not mean that they were any more likely to agree with each other. Indeed, the global media spotlight in places like the West Bank and Northern Ireland often magnified misunderstandings. Considering the contrarian nature of Huntington's previous ideas—corruption can sometimes be good; the difference between democracy and dictatorship is less than we think; the sixties radicals were puritanical—"The Clash of Civilizations?" should not have caused much of a stir. In light of subsequent events Huntington's thesis may even seem unremarkable—the ironic fate of true prescience.

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 ... Conflict between civilizations will be the latest phase of the evolution of conflict in the modern world.

But these words did indeed stir passions. An angry response was instantaneous. So was the sheer interest in what Huntington had to say. "The Clash of Civilizations?" was translated into twenty-six languages; scholarly conferences were organized around the world to debate the article. "Unlike Sam's previous works," Brzezinski told me, "the title of this one said it all. So people reacted to a captivating title without reading the interesting nuances in the text itself." Huntington's statement that beyond the universities, luxury hotels, and spanking new suburbs the world was being coarsened with new social and cultural tensions—feeding new political conflicts—was immensely threatening to an elite whose cosmopolitan lifestyle was insulated from the realities that Huntington was describing. For elites in the Third World especially, to acknowledge the truth of Huntington's points would have been to acknowledge the fragility of their own status in their respective societies.

Huntington did not merely say that parts of the world were anarchic, and that catastrophe loomed in Africa and Asia; many analysts were willing to admit that, even if they refused to accord it the proper significance. He also said that the demise of communism in no way meant the demise of the atavistic territorial battles that had been the stuff of power politics since time immemorial. The liberal project to unite the world through universal values was destined to be stillborn. For those who thought that the end of the Cold War meant a less dangerous world, this sort of thinking was an insult. Many of the criticisms of "The Clash" amounted to mere value judgments—"morally dangerous," "a self-fulfilling prophecy"—rather than substantive disputation.

From the archives:

"The Coming Anarchy" (February 1994)

How scarcity, crime, overpopulation, tribalism, and disease are rapidly destroying the social fabric of our planet. By Robert D. Kaplan

But there was an attack on grounds of substance, too. The central charge: Huntington was being simplistic. The Islamic world, for example, wasn't uniform. Individual Muslim states often fought or denounced one another. Huntington answered his critics in a second *Foreign Affairs* article, later in 1993, maintaining that simplicity was the very point: "When people think seriously, they think abstractly; they conjure up simplified pictures of reality called concepts, theories, models, paradigms. Without such intellectual constructs, there is, William James said, only 'a bloomin' buzzin' confusion.'" The paradigm

of the Cold War, Huntington pointed out, did not account for many of the conflicts and other developments from 1945 to 1989; nevertheless, it summed up reality better than other paradigms did. In an age when so many academics and intellectuals, fearful of attacks from other academics and intellectuals, prefer the safety of mutually canceling subtleties, Huntington was asserting—and defending—the scholar's duty to say what he actually thinks in stark and general terms.

In the book that emerged from his article, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (1996), Huntington offered a wealth of other insights. He showed that whereas the West has generated ideologies, the East has generated religions—and explained that religion is now the more menacing force on the international scene. He pointed out, counterintuitively, that because communism was a Central European ideology, the Soviet Union was philosophically closer to the West than is the Eastern Orthodox Russia that has succeeded it. He reminded us that the Cold War was a fleeting event compared with the age-old struggle between the West and Islam. In the Middle Ages, Muslim armies advanced through Iberia as far as France, and through the Balkans as far as the gates of Vienna. A similar process of advance, demographically rather than militarily, is now under way in Europe. "The dangerous clashes of the future," Huntington wrote, "are likely to arise from the interaction of Western arrogance, Islamic intolerance, and Sinic [Chinese] assertiveness."

In the years since his article and book were published, NATO has expanded into three Protestant-Catholic countries while leaving out several Eastern Orthodox countries, so that the map of NATO, with some exceptions, resembles that of medieval Western Christendom. Meanwhile, Christians continue to flee the Middle East as the specter of Islamic oppression rises in Lebanon, Syria, and the Palestinian territories. American church groups, liberal and conservative alike, have united to support Christians fighting for human rights in China, and against Muslims slaughtering Christians in Sudan. Huntington's ability to account for these and so many other phenomena within a general theory points up the lasting importance of his work. Meanwhile, where are the Kremlinologists who during the Cold War told us that the Soviet system was basically stable; or the Africanists who in the 1960s and 1970s predicted growth and development in places that have since been torn apart by war?

How do Huntington's ideas apply to the current crisis stemming from the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington? He speaks with reluctance about specific policies the United States ought to pursue. Huntington has warned in the past that it is pointless to expect people who are not at all like us to become significantly more like us; this well-meaning instinct only causes harm. "In the emerging world of ethnic conflict and civilizational clash, Western belief in the universality of Western culture suffers three problems: it is false, it is immoral, and it is dangerous." In the incipient war being led by the United States, the utmost caution is required to keep the focus on the brute fact of terrorism. He observes that Osama bin Laden, for his part, clearly hopes to incite civilizational conflict between Islam and the West. The United States must prevent this from happening, chiefly by assembling a coalition against terrorism that crosses civilizational lines. Beyond that, the United States must take this opportunity to accomplish two things: first, to draw the nations of the West more tightly together; and second, to try to understand more realistically how the world looks through the eyes of other people. This is a time for a kind of tough-minded humility in our objectives and for an implacable but measured approach in our methods.

And he adds this coda, about the world in which we live: "It is a dangerous place, in which large numbers of people resent our wealth, power, and culture, and vigorously oppose our efforts to persuade or coerce them to accept our values of human rights, democracy, and capitalism. In this world America must learn to distinguish among our true friends who will be with us and we with them through thick and thin; opportunistic allies with whom we have some but not all interests in common; strategic partner-competitors with whom we have a mixed relationship; antagonists who are rivals but with whom negotiation is possible; and unrelenting enemies who will try to destroy us unless we destroy them first."

VIII.

H Real conservatism cannot aspire to lofty principles, because its task is to defend what already

exists. The conservative dilemma is that conservatism's legitimacy can come only from being proved right by events, whereas liberals, whenever they are proved wrong, have universal principles to fall back on. Samuel Huntington has always held liberal ideals. But he knows that such ideals cannot survive without power, and that power requires careful upkeep.

If American political science leaves any lasting intellectual monument, the work of Samuel Huntington will be one of its pillars. A passage in the conclusion of *American Politics* has always seemed to me to capture the essence of Huntington's enduring judgment and political sensibility: "Critics say that America is a lie because its reality falls so far short of its ideals. They are wrong. America is not a lie; it is a disappointment. But it can be a disappointment only because it is also a hope."

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