

AMERICA IN THE WORLD

Samuel P. Huntington

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AMERICA'S ROLE IN THE WORLD HAS CHANGED, AND the impact of the world on America has changed. Many people assume that these changes result from the horrible events of September 11th and that these events have caused us to be living in an entirely new world. Is this, however, really the case? I have my doubts.

The increased role of terrorism as a threat and the cooperative efforts of many nations to cope with that threat have certainly added an important new dimension to global politics. The fundamental characteristics of today's global politics and America's global role, however, are the result not of what happened in 2001 in New York and Washington but of what happened over a decade ago in Moscow. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War produced changes in three central aspects of the global geopolitical and strategic environment: the global power structure; the bases for the alignment and antagonism of states; and the prevailing type of war in the world. These developments have significantly affected the American role in global affairs.

Global Power Structure

During the Cold War we had a bipolar international system with two superpowers. Each dominated part of the world and competed for influence in the rest of the world. Rivalry between them was inherent in that situation and was enhanced by each promoting its own political ideology throughout the world.

Now there is only one superpower. Much debate goes on, however, as to whether today's world is unipolar, multipolar, or something else. A unipolar world is one that has one superpower, no significant major powers, and many minor powers. In that world the superpower acting unilaterally with little or no cooperation from other states can effectively resolve major international issues, and no combination of other states has the power to prevent it from doing so. For several centuries, Rome and, at times in history, East Asia dominated by China approximated this model. We speak of the Roman and Chinese empires, and some people today talk approvingly of an emerging American empire. A multipolar world, in contrast, has several major states of comparable strength, which cooperate and compete with each other in shifting patterns and in which a coalition of major states is necessary to resolve important international issues. European politics approximated this model for several centuries.

Contemporary international politics does not fit either of these models. Instead it is a mixture or hybrid of one superpower, which is not an empire, and several major powers. It might be called a uni-multipolar system. This means two things. First, with respect to major international issues, the single superpower is usually able to veto the actions of combinations of other major powers. Second, the single superpower can resolve key international issues only in cooperation with some of the other major states.

In this uni-multipolar world, the global power structure has four levels. At the top, the United States has preeminence in every domain of power. At the second level are major regional powers, which are the dominant actors in important areas of the world but whose interests and capabilities do not extend as globally as those of the U.S.

These include the European Union, Russia, China, India, Iran, Brazil, and others. These countries obviously vary greatly in importance, activity, and degree of dominance. At a third level are secondary regional powers whose influence in their region is less than that of the major regional powers. Finally, at the fourth level are all the remaining countries, some of which are quite important for various reasons but which do not play roles in the global power structure comparable to countries at the top three levels.

The Cold War bipolar structure of power inevitably generated conflict between the two superpowers. This new uni-multipolar structure generates its own very different patterns of conflict. As the only superpower, the U.S. has global interests and actively attempts to promote its interests in every region of the world. This brings it into conflict with the major regional powers, which view the U.S. as an intruder and believe they should play the dominant role in determining what goes on in their regions. Thus a natural basis for rivalry exists between the U.S. and the principal regional powers. Within each region the secondary powers do not want to be dominated by the major regional power, and they try to restrict the ability of the major regional power to shape events in that region.

These competitive relations create a basis for cooperation between the U.S. and secondary regional powers, and that is happening. In the past decade, to counterbalance China, the U.S. has strengthened its alliance with Japan and has supported the extension of Japanese military capabilities. The U.S. maintains its special relationship with Britain, which provides leverage against the emerging power of a united Europe dominated by Germany and France. Poland now rivals Britain as our closest ally in Europe because neither the Poles nor we want Poland again to be dominated by its historic enemies, Germany and Russia. The U.S. has also developed close relations with Ukraine, as well as Georgia and Uzbekistan, as counters to any expansion of Russian power. The U.S. maintains close cooperation with Saudi Arabia to balance Iran's power in the Gulf. In South America, the U.S. has historically had friendly relations with Brazil and antagonistic ones with Argentina. In the 1990s, however, Brazil emerged as the rival of the U.S. for influence in South America, and the U.S. formed much

closer relations with Argentina. In all these cases and potentially in others, cooperation serves the mutual interest of the U.S. and the secondary regional powers in containing the influence of principal regional powers.

The major regional powers share a common interest in cooperating together to limit the influence of the U.S. Many of them—France, Russia, China, Iran, and India—have at times tried to act together to promote their interests against the U.S. At the same time, however, each major regional power usually wants to get things from the U.S.: membership in international organizations, technology, weapons, economic assistance, diplomatic support, invitations to the White House for their leaders. This has so far limited their ability to form a stable anti-American alliance, but that could come in the future.

In the meantime, however, the major regional powers are precisely the countries that the U.S. has needed to enlist in its anti-terrorist coalition. Immediately after September 11th, it was very successful in securing the cooperation of the EU, Russia, China, India, Israel, and even Iran. On the one hand, American relations with Russia and India, in particular, have improved dramatically, aided not only by the mutual concern about terrorism but also by a shared concern about China. On the other hand, American relations with the EU, Iran, China, and Israel are returning to their pre-September 11th pattern.

There is a reason for this. There is no single war on terrorism; there are many wars. The United States is fighting a global war against Al Qaeda and its affiliates. Russia is fighting a local war against the Chechens, China a local war against the Uighurs, India a local war against the Kashmiris, and Israel a local war against the Palestinians. The insurgents in these wars have three things in common. First, they are Muslim groups fighting to achieve autonomy or independence from non-Muslim governments. Second, in terms of conventional military power, they are much weaker than the states against which they are rebelling. Third, as a result, they use terrorism, which has always been the weapon of the weak. These wars are, however, separate wars, and the interests of the U.S. in these local wars do not necessarily coincide with those of the governments fighting them. In due course the rivalries between the U.S. and the major regional powers are once again likely to dominate the scene.

The Primacy of Culture

Let me now turn to the second distinctive characteristic of contemporary global politics. As I argue in *The Clash of Civilizations*, international relations are always about power but also always about something else.¹ During the Cold War that something else was political-economic ideology. Now culture has replaced ideology in shaping the identities, affinities, and antagonisms of peoples and states. People everywhere are defining their identities in terms of ancestry, religion, language, history, values, customs, and institutions. They identify with cultural groups: tribes, ethnic groups, religious communities, nationalities, and, at the broadest level, civilizations. In this new world, local politics is the politics of ethnicity; global politics is the politics of civilizations. The most important groupings of countries are the world's major civilizations. Now, for the first time in human history, the global politics is clearly multicivilizational.

The West has been and will remain the dominant civilization for decades to come. Yet a shift in relative power is occurring with the demographic dynamism of Islam and the economic dynamism of China and other Asian societies increasing their role and power in world affairs. As non-Western societies modernize, they increasingly resist Westernization and instead affirm the value of their indigenous cultures. Countries that are culturally similar are coming together, because it is easier for them to understand and trust each other. The success of efforts at regional economic integration has varied with the degree of cultural commonality of the countries involved. The leading or core states of civilizations are grouping about themselves other states that share their culture. Old antagonisms are reviving between countries that were on the same side during the Cold War but are culturally different. As part of this cultural resurgence, religion is increasingly important in shaping the identities and alignments of states. To cite just one example of this trend, Greece, long a member of both NATO and the EU, has reinvigorated its Orthodox identity, deviated sharply

¹ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Touchstone, 1996).

from its NATO partners in siding with Serbia and Milosovich in the Yugoslav wars, and, in many respects, has become a close strategic partner of Russia. This shift was bluntly expressed by President Stephanopoulos in his remarks in October 1997 at Mount Athos when he said, “Today we do not face any threat from the North...Now these countries have the same religious beliefs we do. Today we face a vicious threat from the West...from the Papists and the Protestants.” Culture and religion are indeed shaping the alignments and antagonisms of countries throughout the world.

Nowhere has the increased identity with religion and culture been greater than in the Muslim world. One of the most significant social, cultural, and political developments in the past several decades has been the resurgence of Islamic consciousness, movements, and identity among Muslim peoples almost everywhere. This Islamic Resurgence is in large part a response to modernization and globalization. Islamist organizations have moved in to meet the needs of urban Muslims by providing social support, moral guidance, welfare, healthcare, education, unemployment relief—all services which Muslim governments often do not provide. Muslims are increasingly conscious of their Muslim identity. In addition, in many Muslim societies, Islamists are the principal opposition to highly repressive governments. As one manifestation of this new centrality of culture and religion in world politics, the Islamic Resurgence has spun off a small number of extremists who assert their Islamic identity through violence against the West, particularly the United States. It also has inspired all those Muslim groups that resist rule by non-Muslim governments.

Culture and civilization were central to the reactions of governments and peoples to September 11th. Due to the new global power structure, tensions and differences developed between the United States and Europe during the 1990s. America and Europe, it was often said, were drifting apart. Following September 11th, however, European governments and peoples at least briefly identified themselves with Americans and were overwhelmingly sympathetic and supportive, rushing to join with the United States in the war on terrorism. Britain, Canada, and Australia—societies that share a common Anglo culture with the U.S.—were particularly supportive. They quickly deployed military forces to

fight alongside ours in the Afghan War. The leading countries of non-Western, non-Muslim civilizations—Russia, China, India, and Japan—in contrast, reacted with modulated expressions of sympathy and support. Almost all Muslim governments condemned the terrorist attacks, undoubtedly concerned with the threat Muslim extremist groups posed to their own authoritarian regimes, but with the notable exceptions of Turkey, Pakistan, and Uzbekistan, they then became increasingly critical of the American military response. People in Muslim countries cheered the attacks, and huge majorities in most Muslim countries expressed sympathy for Al Qaeda and opposed U.S. intervention in Afghanistan. What we see as a war on terrorism, they, quite understandably, see as a war on Islam, which brings me to the third major change in global politics, concerning the dominant form of conflict today.

The Age of Muslim Wars

The first half of the twentieth century was the age of world wars; the second half was the age of the Cold War. The twenty-first century is beginning as the age of civil and communal wars. One hundred ten major wars occurred during the 1990s. All but seven of these wars were civil wars within states, and seventy percent of these civil wars were communal wars between ethnic and religious groups. Many of these wars involved Muslims, who fight each other and fight non-Muslims far more often than do peoples of other civilizations.

In the 1990s significant violence between Muslims and non-Muslims occurred in Bosnia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Chechnya, Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, Kashmir, India, the Philippines, Indonesia, the Middle East, Sudan, and Nigeria. In the mid-1990s, roughly half the ethnic conflicts in the world involved Muslims fighting each other or non-Muslims. In one inventory, *The Economist* identified sixteen major acts of international terrorism between 1983 and 2000. Muslims were responsible for eleven and possibly twelve of them. Five of the seven states listed by the U.S. State Department as supporting terrorism are Muslim, as are a majority of the organizations listed as engaged in terrorism. According to the International Institute of Strategic Studies, 32 major armed conflicts

were underway in 2000. Twenty-three—more than two-thirds—involved Muslims. Yet Muslims are only about one-fifth of the world's population.

The causes of this Muslim violence are not inherent in the nature of Islam as a religion. They are the offspring of the resurgence of Muslim consciousness and identity. In addition, throughout the Muslim world, and particularly among Arabs, there exists a great sense of grievance, resentment, envy, and hostility towards the West and particularly the United States. This is in part a result of Western imperialism and domination of the Muslim world for much of the twentieth century. It is also in part the result of particular Western policies, including the continuing close relation between the United States and Israel. In many instances Muslims are fighting to free themselves from non-Muslim rule.

Islam is less unified than any other civilization. Tribal, religious, ethnic, political, and cultural divisions stimulate violence between Muslims. They also promote violence between Muslims and non-Muslims because different Muslim groups and governments, such as those of Saudi Arabia and Iran, compete with each other in promoting their own brand of Islam and have supported Muslim groups fighting non-Muslims from Bosnia to the Philippines. If one or two states dominated the Muslim world, as is the case with other civilizations but which has not been true for Islam since the Ottoman Empire, less violence would occur among Muslims and, probably, between Muslims and non-Muslims.

Finally, and perhaps most important, the Islamic Resurgence has coincided with and been invigorated by high birthrates in most Muslim societies, which have produced a "youth bulge" with large numbers of people between the ages of 16 and 30. Males in this age cohort often have secondary, technical, or higher education; are in large part unemployed, and hence migrate to the West; join fundamentalist organizations and political parties; and in small numbers enlist in the Muslim guerilla groups and terrorist networks. Young males are the principal perpetrators of violence in all societies: they exist in over-abundant numbers in Muslim societies. In two decades their numbers will decrease in most Muslim societies. For the immediate future, however,

the relations between Islam and others are likely to be at best distant and acrimonious and at worst conflictual and violent.

The Interaction of Power, Culture, and Muslim Wars

To sum up, relations are likely to be particularly difficult and antagonistic between countries at different but adjoining levels in the global power structure, between countries belonging to different civilizations, and in situations involving Muslim groups and countries. Conflicts are likely to be most frequent and most dangerous when power and civilizational differences coincide. Particularly antagonistic relations will exist between India and Pakistan and between Israel and the Arab world generally, and are likely also to be difficult between China and Japan and between Indonesia and Australia. Differences in power and culture mean that the relations of the United States will be difficult with most of the major regional powers, less so with the European Union, and possibly Brazil and Israel, than with the others. In the relations between the U.S. and the EU, in particular, a dramatic contrast exists between the logic of culture, which promotes mutual identification and cooperation, as happened immediately after September 11th, and the logic of power, which generates the antagonism that resurfaced in 2002.

The potentially most dangerous of these rivalries is that between the United States and China. Many specific issues currently separate these two countries: trade, human rights, arms sales, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, Tibet, and Taiwan. The fundamental issue, however, is one of power reinforced by profound civilizational differences. Which country will play the major role in shaping developments in East Asia in the coming decades? The Chinese have made it clear that they see their era of subordination to and humiliation by other major powers coming to an end and that they expect to resume the hegemonic position that they had in East Asia until the mid-nineteenth century. The United States, on the other hand, has always opposed the domination of Western Europe or East Asia by any single power, and in the last century fought and won two world wars and one Cold War to prevent that from happening. Whether conflict or accommodation will characterize Chinese-American relations is thus central to the future of world peace.

Implications for the United States

In this new global environment, the United States is powerful, vulnerable, and isolated.

First, we are, as I have emphasized, clearly more powerful than we have ever been before. In terms of the reach of our power, we are more powerful than any other country has been in human history, and for the immediate future we are more powerful than any likely combination of opposing countries.

Second, at the same time, we are more vulnerable to attack than we have been for almost two hundred years. The last time that something like September 11th happened in the continental U.S. was on August 25, 1814, when the British burned the White House. Since then Americans have assumed that security and invulnerability were inherent and lasting characteristics of our nation. We fought our wars across thousands of miles of ocean, which kept us safe and free. September 11th brutally awakened us from that illusion. We are now in a war that will be fought on many fronts, the most important of which is right here at home. President Bush has said, "We refuse to live in fear." Yet, this is a fearful world, and we have no choice but to live *with* fear, if not *in* fear. Coping with these new threats will require difficult trade-offs between the preservation of what we have assumed to be traditional American freedoms and the preservation of that most important freedom which we have taken for granted: the freedom to be safe here at home from violent enemy assaults on our lives, our property, and our institutions.

Third, during the Cold War we confronted a powerful and ruthless adversary but one that was also rational and predictable. We also had common interests with scores of countries in preventing the spread of Soviet communism. We now exist, however, in a "cold world" that is unfamiliar, unpredictable, unsafe, and unfriendly. In the weeks after September 11th, Americans were asking themselves, "Why do they hate us so much?" They hate us in part for what we do, but also for what we are. They fear our power, envy our wealth, condemn our values, and resent our arrogance. The good news is that not everyone hates us.

The bad news is that we have very few real friends in this world; they can be counted on the fingers of one hand.

The major regional powers have every reason to see us as a rival in shaping developments in their region. But they are not the only ones who view America at best with suspicion and distrust and at worst with open hostility. In 1997, long before the September 11th attacks, my institute at Harvard had a large conference involving experts on international relations from all the world's major countries and regions. We asked them what the political elites of their countries saw as the major threats to their country. Their responses showed that the elites in countries with over 70% of the world's population viewed the U.S. as the principal threat to their country. One Indian scholar expressed the prevailing view when he said that this was not because we were going to invade them militarily, but because for India

the United States represents the major diplomatic and political threat. On virtually every issue of concern to India, the United States has "veto" ...power, whether it is on nuclear, technological, economic, environmental, or political matters. That is, the United States can deny India its objectives and can rally others to join it in punishing India.

America's sins, he added, are "power, hubris, and greed."

At this conference, the distinguished Japanese diplomat, Hisashi Owada, delivered a talk in which he argued that after World War II the United States pursued a course of "unilateral globalism," promoting global public goods, such as the strengthening of international organizations, support for international law, reduction in trade barriers, security against Soviet communism, and Third World economic development. Now, in contrast, he said, the U.S. is pursuing a policy of "global unilateralism," pursuing its own special interests throughout the world with little attention to the interests and concerns of others. For a Japanese diplomat to say this publicly was astonishing. His remarks were, however, echoed about the same time by a British diplomat, who said, "One reads about the world's desire for American leadership only in the United States. Everywhere else one reads about

American arrogance and unilateralism.” When statements like these come not just from the Chinese, Russians, or French, but from our British and Japanese friends, we need to take them seriously.

To a considerable extent we ourselves have generated these attitudes by our efforts to impose our values and institutions on other countries. We suffer from what can be called the universalist illusion that the peoples of other countries have the same values and culture that we do; or if they do not have them, that they desperately want to have them; or if they do not want to have them, that something’s wrong with them, and we have the responsibility to persuade or coerce them into adopting our values and culture.

In the contemporary world, on specific issues, the interests of the U.S. will converge with those of some other countries. On major issues, however, the U.S. will often be alone. The U.S. will have few close friends and many active and potential antagonists. An only superpower is necessarily a lonely superpower. And that is a reality we have to learn to live with in today’s cold world.