A Clash of Systems: An Analytical Framework to Demystify the Radical Islamist Threat

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In the Winter 2004-05 issue of *Parameters*, Philip Seib makes a laudable effort to establish the imperative for journalists, policymakers, and the American public to "undertake a more sophisticated analysis of how the world works."[1] This is critical because the analytical framework adopted by the media and policymakers has a direct effect on how they approach news coverage and frame discussions regarding the threat posed by radical Islamist extremists. This in turn directly affects public opinion in the United States and the world, which in the context of a war of ideas is directly related to the success or failure of both sides. Professor Seib also pointed out the fact that the "clash of civilizations" theory espoused by Samuel Huntington has been widely criticized, and this article rejects it as an appropriate analytical framework. Our purpose is to provide an alternative framework that portrays the current global conflict as a clash of *systems*, not civilizations.

The central danger of accepting Huntington's model as a basis for analysis is that it is the chosen model of radical Islamists, who in turn use it to mobilize support. If a clash of civilizations is accepted in the West—or worse, accepted by the populations in Muslim states—then the forces attempting to overturn the global system could eventually succeed. Success, however, is not battalions of extremist Islamists marching down Pennsylvania Avenue; rather, it is the replacement of "apostate" regimes with an Islamic Caliphate, which can occur only once the current US-led global system is destroyed. Therefore, it is imperative that the wider global war on terror focus on the systemic impli-

cations of the struggle, which provides a credible methodology to address and mitigate the root causes that fuel the ideology of extremist Islamism.

Many authors have identified the imminent threat posed to the United States by radical Islamists in the ongoing Global War on Terrorism, and a number of them have described it as a war of ideas. What is lacking in the ongoing discourse, however, is a conceptual framework necessary for an in-depth analysis of the basic conflict. The current threat environment is based on a clash of systems between the US-led global system, in which the phenomenon of globalization has created unprecedented connectivity and prosperity in the developed world, and those who oppose this system and wish to replace it with another paradigm. The ideology seeking to overthrow the global system is extremist Islamism.[2] It is put into action by transnational Islamist terrorists as well as regional and indigenous extremists, who wish to replace the secular, US-led global system with an Islamist world order. States along the periphery of the US-led system, where Western liberal democratic ideology and values underlying globalization directly clash with radical Islamism, constitute the main battleground. This is where the primary objective of US national power should be aimed: at convincing the undecided multitudes that becoming part of the global system is a better option than fighting against it. In order to prevent states and populations in this periphery from accepting integration into the global system, radical Islamists attempt to frame the ongoing conflict as a clash of civilizations.

Clash of Systems Framework

The first part of this framework is to establish that there is an international system made up of states and non-state actors. Though there is no world government, rules that guide interactions among these actors on the world

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stage do exist.[3] These are formed either by consensus (norms of international law and commerce) or are imposed by a major power such as the United Kingdom in the 19th century and the United States in the 20th.[4] This system includes not only norms of interaction, international law, and treaties, but also institutions. The most important aspects of the post-World War II world system are the West's multinational organizations. They owe their origins to the 1941 Atlantic Charter of liberal principles established to guide the postwar world, and the 1944 Bretton Woods Conference on monetary order (both American initiatives). These gave birth to various organizations, including the United Nations, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and the World Trade Organization (WTO). These organizations and the world order of open economies and dispute management were intended to prevent problems among Western industrial capitalist states—not to fight Soviet communism, which was a separate system—and they continue to endure despite the end of the Cold War.[5] Therefore, the underlying Western-inspired world order remains intact and is even expanding as China, Russia, and other states of the former Soviet Union join Western organizations. This demonstrates the ongoing vigor of Western values and principles in an international and multinational context. This system is still in place and forms the framework that enables "globalization" to occur, which is in many ways an acceleration of the speed of interactions within the system, and an indicator of their scope. The Islamists understand this relationship, which explains why these institutions are targets for al Qaeda.

Thomas Friedman has described "globalization" as a system, and as operating within the "liberal rules of economics . . . the software being the rule of law, courts, regulatory institutions, oversight bodies, free press, and democracy."[6] He also observes that globalization is happening in a power structure that isn't driven just by electrons and stock options. It's a power structure maintained and preserved by the US military. The US military is the hidden fist that keeps the hidden hand operating—"Ain't no McDonald's without McDonnell Douglas, and without America on Duty there's no America Online."[7] This article agrees with Friedman's view of globalization as a system that promotes this increased mobility and the speed of exchange of these elements.

This global system established and maintained by the United States provides the background on which an analytical framework can be built. As the world's sole superpower, the United States will continue to dominate and influence all aspects of the global system for the foreseeable future. Although hegemonies are uncertain, there currently are no powers that accept the global system (this includes most of the world's major states) which are capable of overturning this hegemony without damaging the system itself. In this regard,

the greatest threat to US hegemony is not competition within the system, but is instead composed of elements that seek a complete overthrow of the global system. The United States owes this tremendous position of power to its ability to leverage its influence and leadership in the global system, which provides considerable benefit (economically, politically, and militarily) in return. Furthermore, in order to maintain this position as global hegemon, the United States is a status quo power within the global system that must protect and conserve it. In its relations with states that have not accepted the global system, the United States must be an agent for change in order to expand, if possible, the global system from which it derives such benefit.

Thomas Barnett describes the world in terms of a "Functioning Core" of states that have embraced the Western world system of "globalization." These states have stable governments, rising standards of living, liberal media, and are included in one or more systems of collective security. There are also states that have only begun to integrate or have not yet fully integrated into the world system, and are described as "Seam States" on the boundary of the "Functioning Core." Barnett calls other areas (which do not accept "globalization" or the global system) the "Non-Integrating Gap." It is no accident that these areas are trouble spots, and are where the United States is most likely to intervene militarily.[8] This three-level construct of globalization indicates the global Western system has limits that affect how it functions. These constraints are, interestingly enough, connected to liberal Western concepts such as the rule of law and individual rights, reflecting an important point regarding this global framework. It is built on ideas and values that stand in direct opposition to those of the extremist Islamists.

In return for setting the rules for international interactions (which benefit the rule-maker), the United States provides security to maintain the system. Other actors or powers will support the United States if they receive more benefit from the system's continuation than from its demise. At the same time they may also jockey for position within the system. On the other hand, if they do not feel that the system provides appropriate benefits, then they will challenge the system and attempt to overthrow or change it through conflict.[9] While many observers of the international system believe that states which clearly are part of the global system may seek to form partnerships and coalitions as a means of mitigating the dominating influence of US power structures, there will be times when members of the system jockey for its leadership. No state is currently seeking to replicate our capabilities across all instruments of power. There is no "near peer competitor" with a desire to replace the current system. In fact, the major world powers—the United States, the European Union, China, Japan, and Russia—are in fact part of the system, or are attempting to integrate further into it (e.g., China and the WTO).

Though no state is attempting to overthrow the Western global system, there are states that are not fully integrated into it, and despite the intactness and growing inclusiveness of the system, there are still outsiders who believe the system is unjust and are unable to share its benefits. It is these latter areas, which are part of the seam, or the non-integrating gap, where the most critical battles in the wider clash of systems will occur.

The Islamist Challenge

Political Islam (Islamism), in various forms, is the most rapidly growing and persuasive ideology among Muslims today. Islamism is a socio-political ideology which strives to institute governments under Allah's authority, not man-made constitutions, and administration of society according to *sharia* (Islamic law), not Western law.[10] The ideology of Islamism is the cutting edge of Islamic militants' exertions against the West and its global system. As an ideology, Islamism is distinct from the religion of Islam, although it draws strength from zealous members of the Islamic resurgence. The Islamic resurgence does not protest against Islamic institutions, but, rather, protests against secular governments and social innovations modeled on the West. Understanding the Islamists' critique of modern life provides some clarity to these distinctions. Most Islamists (except for retrograde Salafists) are not against modern instrumentalities produced by industries (telephones, cars, airplanes, computers, etc.). Rather, Islamists are opposed to *modernism*, a sequel to industrialization and modernization, which is the ideology of social innovation in a secular environment completely unhinged from traditional and religious norms.

Islamism is ideological because it employs Islam for the socio-political goal of establishing governments under Allah's sovereignty with societies based on *sharia*. Islamism "fuses religion and politics, *din wa dawla*, in a way incompatible with Western analytical categories."[11] Establishing such governments and societies is meant to preserve Islamic religion and culture and to reverse Western domination. Culturally, many Islamic traditionalists feel eclipsed by the Western way of life in the globalized economy. Islamism is ascendant in its competition against secular Western political models within large segments of the Muslim world. In predominantly Islamic countries, Islamism has absorbed much of nationalist parties' ideologies, leaving nationalists weak. Generally in such countries, the left is marginal and in disarray and liberal democrats are few. Islamists heed the Koran's specific direction: "Fight in the cause of God against those who fight you."[12]

The Islamists' slogan, "Islam is the solution" (popularized by the Egyptian Sayyid Qutb), will continue to inspire political exertions against Western-type governments in Islamic countries, until or unless the West con-

vinces the Islamic world that it can have an equitable stake in globalization. Islamists will resist cultural and political influences of the West's global system, even if they acquiesce to economic interaction and trade. Their resistance to the West is not to imply mainly overt clashes. Most clashes for the proximate future will occur within the Islamic world itself, just as industrial countries of the West's global system will have their own internal (especially social) problems.

There are significant elements of Western culture that make the West less than entirely appealing to many in the Islamic world, both Muslims and Islamists. Though many appreciate the material benefits and technological advances that the West has to offer, Islamists tend to believe the West diluted the basis of its classical Christian civilization due to the Renaissance and Scientific Revolution, followed by the Philosophical Revolution (based on natural law) and its empiricism, rationalism, and positivism. Even though this enabled technological innovation and industrialization, the removal of religion from its previous position as the basis for all knowledge meant that Christianity lost its centrality over the course of several centuries as the arbiter of how society should function. Today, religion in the West is compartmentalized due to increased secularization since the 1970s. Because of this, the overt manifestation of the West is characterized by its industrial order, which gives it overwhelming material superiority over agricultural or other resource-exporting countries,[13] but not moral superiority because secularization has eroded traditional morality.[14] Social relativism has become the norm, which Muslims and Islamists regard as unacceptable for emulation. In contrast, traditional societies still harboring tenets of their classical civilizations value spirituality (rather than consumerism), a God-centered view of the world (rather than a human-centered one), prescribed patterns of behavior (rather than innovative ones), extended families (rather than individualism and nuclear families), and a belief in absolutes (rather than relativism).

While the industrial West has emphasized secular rationalism, it also has engendered a certain degree of dissatisfaction with materialism as the primary focus of life. Westerners are likely to seek spirituality in their "flight from the meaninglessness of the secular world,"[15] reviving various sects of Christianity or importing other religions (such as Bahai'ism) or creating new synergetic ones (such as Scientology). The fear of "importing" a similar spiritual void is one of the reasons why Islamists reject Western modernism. The West's insistence on democratic government and the rule of law is a function of industrial and commercial efficacy, not high-minded principles from Western classical civilization.[16] In any case, these features are integrated into industrial societies of the global system, and may make it awkward for countries outside the system to join. For Islamic countries, democracy is more about access than

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process, and Islamic law is based on *sharia*, which is very different from Western law. Also, the West's secularity presents serious cultural problems for Islam, creating tension alongside the potential economic benefits of joining the West's global system.

Despite US or Euro-centric views (such as Francis Fukuyama's *End of History*), the West's industrial order and global system do not have universal appeal. However, the West's industrial order claims a universal applicability of its global system. This puts it in direct conflict with Islamists, who also proclaim the universality of their system. Radical Islamists will accept only *our* unconditional surrender.

Our current conflict of ideologies is centered on the answer to the question of what constitutes "a good life." In the West, the answer is found in the individual rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. For the radical Islamists, the answer is in one's submission to the will of God through the imposition of their interpretation of *sharia* throughout the Muslim world.

A Clash of Systems in the Middle East

To Huntington's disciples, al Qaeda's strike on the economic and military power base of the United States clearly represents an attack by the Islamic civilization against that of the United States and the West. Such an argument is persuasive, particularly when one looks at the undercurrents of recent events in the Middle East: the ubiquitous Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the vicious campaign being conducted by foreign jihadists against US forces in Iraq, a resurgence of the Islamist ideology across Barnett's non-integrating gap,[17] enhanced violent activity perpetrated by radical Islamist groups across the region, the spread of weapons of mass destruction in the region, and cooperation between regional states and militant groups. Yet Huntington's thesis fails to capture the true nature of the conflict that currently grips the Middle East. It is not simply a result of irreconcilable differences between Western and Islamic civilizations; it is instead a deeper clash of international systems of order—globalization vs. Islamism.

Under the current system of US-led globalization, a given state has two options—beating the system or joining it. In the Middle East, this debate is raging in an emotional and often violent manner, and it is fast becoming a battle for the soul of the Islamic world. This conflict pits two sides against each other: those who embrace the system—i.e., moderates who seek to reconcile the Islamic culture, religion, and worldview with the benefits of modernization and globalization—against those who would seek to destroy it, personified by Osama bin Laden and other extremists of his ilk, and who wish to replace it with an alternative system, in this case a world guided by the ideology of Islamism.

For Islamists, there are two main targets in their effort to bring about an Islamist system. The United States and its Western allies constitute one target. The other, perhaps more important, is the governments and elites of the states across the Middle East, who walk a narrow tightrope between accepting the dramatic benefits of the global system and heeding the wishes of the majority of the populace who receive little in the way of benefits from their own governments, let alone from the wider global system.

As a result, Islamists are fighting a two-pronged conflict. On the one hand, they have initiated a wide-reaching war against US interests and allies which includes not only direct combat against US military forces, but also attacks like those of 9/11 that target Americans and other Western civilians. Second, in the Middle East the Islamists view the acceptance of a corrupt, godless, immoral system by the civilian populace as being responsible for the Western system's spread. Consequently Islamists are engaged in a comprehensive battle for hearts and minds.

Their strategic objective to replace the Western system with one inspired by the divine hinges entirely upon successfully converting the populace to Islamist ideology. Islamists point to the hopelessness endemic throughout much of the region, where a handful of leaders and business elites reap economic rewards from collaborating with the US-led system while the vast majority live in a pitiful squalor, where daily life is a challenge. Instead of cooperating with a system where a few get rich, Islamists insist upon a strict interpretation of the Koran and look to the glory days of a bygone era when the Muslim world dominated the international system. Instead of buying into a system that is "corrupt" and accepting a culture that is "immoral," Islamists seek to create an alternative system similar to the one that once held a position of dominance. Islamists ask Muslims to accept the concept that "Islam is the solution," popularized by Qutb as early as 1952. Qutb argued that a philosophical break was required with modernism if a Muslim was to be true to his faith. This break is not a starting point for the intellectual study of the impact of modernism on the Islamic world, but instead becomes a manifesto demanding a

radical change, inspired by the divine truths espoused in the Koran.[18] In essence, Qutb's philosophy, which has been adopted by a long string of Islamist radicals culminating in bin Laden, espouses a clash of civilizations between the wider Islamic *umma* (community of believers) and the West.

For the West, and particularly the United States, it becomes imperative to prevent the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) from becoming such a clash of civilizations, thereby devolving into exactly the kind of conflict that will be to the Islamists' advantage. Instead, the United States also should follow a two-pronged strategy, whereby it selectively confronts Islamists, not simply to crush them, but to demonstrate to the Muslim world the long-term futility of such a conflict. The current focus of this active conflict is on Iraq and Afghanistan. In the words of Friedman, "America's opponents know just what's at stake in the postwar struggle for Iraq, which is why they flock there: beat America in Iraq and you beat them out of the whole region; lose to America there, lose everywhere."[19] Friedman notes the Islamists understand the fight is not about oil, but is instead about "ideas and values and governance."[20] So for the United States, the active stratagem guiding the Global War on Terrorism is unlike anything it has attempted before; instead of concrete, military success, the GWOT is about reinforcing ideas and values (i.e. those that underpin the US-led system), while at the same time demonstrating the inability of Islamists to advance their ideas and values to the wider Islamic community.

This in part explains the frustrating experience the US military is encountering in its nation-building operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. For the enemies of the global system, each successful tactical operation against the US-led Coalition becomes a strategic victory. Each successful attack against US military targets, Coalition partners, or international relief workers is a ringing endorsement for those who oppose the system and seek its replacement. Successful attacks offer "proof" to the undecided masses that the United States will not be able to establish the system in the contested areas of Iraq and Afghanistan, and they help to sway opinion toward alternative systemic constructs. From a US perspective, tactical victories are relevant only insofar as they help to buy time for the global system to take root. As a result, there is no classic definition of military "victory." Military operations in these circumstances should be aimed at implementing security and stability in order for the other elements of national power (e.g., economic and social) to bring concrete improvements to the wider society, which in turn will eventually lead the masses to decide that the US-led global system is worth joining. Providing security and stability are the absolutely necessary preconditions that will allow this systemic acceptance to occur, and that should be the primary focus of US military operations in areas of the non-integrating gap where societies are split between joining the global system or choosing the Islamist alternative.

According to Daniel Pipes, the central task of the United States is to reinforce moderate Islam as a counterbalance to Islamism. Pipes postulates the central conflict in the GWOT is the one waged between militant and moderate Islam. While Washington can help in this struggle by providing assistance to the moderates and working to establish reforms in areas locked in a self-defeating bargain with the militants (such as Saudi Arabia and Pakistan), the actual battle will be won or lost within the Islamic world itself.[21] As a result, the second task implicit in a successful resolution to the GWOT is in supporting those elements in the Middle East that already accept the US-led system, and, most critically, facilitating pro-Western change in those states that straddle the fence.

The issue that makes the Global War on Terrorism so fundamentally different from other ideological conflicts in history is that it pits the US-led global system against non-state actors who transcend political boundaries. These non-state actors are striving to appeal to religion, culture, and even pan-Arab nationalism to forge a decentralized core of ideologically motivated insurgents fighting to overthrow the US-led global system and replace it with one based on their radical interpretations of *sharia*. This conflict is completely asymmetrical, where the enemy realizes it lacks the military capability to directly challenge the US-led system on a global scale. Instead, it relies on the strategy and tactics of the insurgent to selectively engage US and Coalition forces (Khobar Towers, the embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania, the USS *Cole* attack, 9/11) while striking in other venues to make political gains (the Madrid bombing, Bali bombing, kidnappings and murder of foreign nationals in Iraq, the 7/7 bombings in London) to erode Coalition cohesion. Unlike other insurgencies, the GWOT is unique because of its scale. It is, in effect, a pansurgency.[22]

Strategic Conflict of Perceptions

Islamist militants understand their desired strategic objectives. Although they are incapable of militarily defeating the US and Coalition forces on the battlefield, their success is determined by the achievement of their desired strategic political end state—the withdrawal of US forces and the creation of *sharia*-based governments. This type of conflict is ideally suited to the cultural underpinning of Arab and Islamic concepts of warfare. In virtually every historical example involving Arab or Islamic conflict, tactical and even operational-level military operations are considered ancillary to the final political objective. As a result, even overwhelming defeats have been turned into victories or considered simply part of a longer-term conflict. A couple of historical examples highlight this perspective:

● Israel won the most dramatic and complete tactical victories in modern military history during the 1967 Six-Day War. In May 1967, just be-

fore launching the devastating air attack which crippled Egypt's air force, Israeli Prime Minister Levi Eshkol commented to his generals, "Nothing will be settled by a military victory. The Arabs will still be here."[23] Thirty-plus years later, Arabs continue to resist the battlefield outcome of that conflict.

● In the French/Algerian conflict of the 1950s and early 1960s, conventional French military forces won the tactical fight against the insurgent forces, but failed to achieve their strategic objectives due to the collapse of French national will.

The United States currently is facing a tremendous asymmetric challenge. US military operations are focused on winning a tactical fight that does not answer the strategic challenge or target our adversaries' center of gravity, the attraction of their ideology. If US forces fail to orient on the enemy center of gravity, the United States may continue to win the tactical fight while abandoning the strategic advantage to our adversaries, whose tactical operations are designed with a strategic objective in mind. In essence, US forces are playing football while the militants are playing chess.

Meanwhile, the radical Islamists have fixed, and are directly targeting, the United States' center of gravity, its national will to carry on missions in both Iraq and Afghanistan. From the outset, anti-Coalition elements in both locations have relied on the media to target this center of gravity. Although part of this effort has been focused on shaping regional opinion (e.g., condemning US foreign policy and military action, calling for armed resistance, etc.) to sustain their operations, the more damaging aspect of this approach is the targeting of public opinion in the West.

The militants are aided in this fight by some parts of the international media that are eager to report on situations unfavorable to US policy. As a result of this coverage, the militants' tactical fight is elevated to the strategic level, whereby each tactical success (a bombing, a mortar attack, a kidnapping, even a single US or Coalition casualty) becomes a strategic success. This is seen in their targeting selection, which aims to cause as much instability as possible, fracture the Coalition and thereby compel elements of the international community to abandon active participation in these missions. This effort has succeeded in driving out several Coalition partners, NGOs, and regional-based companies participating in the reconstruction efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan. The militants intend to take further advantage of a wider information operations campaign as a strategic weapon. Militants can rely on the coverage of Arab-language broadcast and print media, which often has an unmistakable bias against the United States and the West, to bolster their cause.

The growth of satellite broadcast networks, such as al-Jazeera and al-Arabiya, is one of the most significant developments in the Middle East in recent years. Although these independent outlets represent a fundamental shift

away from state control of the media, they do play upon the emotions of the Arab masses. Suicide bombers in Israel, Iraq, and Afghanistan are not referred to as terrorists, but instead as martyrs. During a discussion of the outbreak of violence in Saudi Arabia following the murder of American contractor Paul Johnson, al-Jazeera anchor Abdul Samad Nasser referred to Saudi Arabia as "Jazeerat al-Arab" (or the Arabian Peninsula). This term was used in Arabic to describe the area prior to the formation of the Saudi state, and also has been adopted by Osama bin Laden in his references to Saudi Arabia in an attempt to delegitimize the Saudi state in the eyes of his followers. In another case, the former chief editor of the pan-Arab daily *Asharq al-Aswat* noted he once caught one his editors changing the caption of an Associated Press photo from "an American soldier chatting with an Iraqi girl" to "an American soldier asking an Iraqi girl for sex." In effect, Arab-language media sources are tacitly supporting the radical Islamists' agenda of creating a clash of civilizations.[24]

Advocating a New System: The Islamist Agenda

The primary objective of Islamists is to overthrow the West's global system and replace it with a traditional Islamic system. From its political expressions during the early 20th century, Islamism challenged Western modernism as the basis for a just world order. Hasan al Banna, the Egyptian schoolteacher who established the Muslim Brotherhood in 1928, railed against the modern world's encroachments on the Islamic world. Banna blamed Mustafa Kemal Attaturk's rise to power in a wave of secular liberalism in Turkey, which spread throughout the Middle East. In 1939, the Muslim Brotherhood transitioned from a social reform movement to a political organization adopting a radical, revolutionary agenda, and in essence became the ideological genesis of today's Islamism. The agenda espoused by the Muslim Brotherhood was threefold:

- Islam is a comprehensive, self-evolving system; it is the ultimate path of life in all spheres.
- Islam emanates from, and is based on, two fundamental sources, the Koran and the Prophetic Tradition.
- Islam is applicable to all times and places.

According to Dilip Hiro, the platform of the Muslim Brotherhood presented an "all-encompassing entity," which offered "an all-powerful system to regulate every detail of the political, economic, social, and cultural life of the believers."[25] Seizing upon Banna's ideas, Qutb argued that true Muslims are in a perpetual state of war against secular political leaders, in which jihad becomes a "defensive response" to the "war of annihilation" the "apostates" wage against Islam. "True Muslims" are and must be set apart from the secular incarnation of government in a "counter-society" of the *umma* (com-

munity of believers). In this counter-society, true Muslims have no allegiance to state or government, but only to the *umma*, striving to create a system based on the Koran.[26] As early as the mid-1950s, Qutb was arguing for jihad against secular influences in Egypt and the Arab world, and also against Western society. He asked, "What should be done about America and the West given their overwhelming danger to humanity. . .? Should we not issue a sentence of death? Is it not the verdict most appropriate to the nature of the crime?"[27] During his trial, Qutb made his final statement in support of his concept of Islamism as a system when he argued, "The bonds of ideology and belief are sturdier than those of patriotism based upon region."[28] He was executed by Nasser in 1966.

There is a direct connection between the ideologies of Banna and Qutb and today's radical Islamists. Judith Miller argues that Qutb's primary legacy to radical Islam's ideology is that of "literalism." Qutb was able to use the words of the Koran and turn them against the Western-dominated system that permeated Middle East governments.[29] His calls for jihad against the West as a religious duty for all Muslims would not only permeate the mainstream of Islamic society but would be seized upon by a new generation of radicals, culminating in bin Laden. Like his ideological mentor Qutb, bin Laden considers Arab governments that have bought into the West's system to be "morally depraved" and "hypocrites" worthy not only of enmity, but of overthrow.[30] According to Emmanuel Sivan, Islamist opposition movements concentrate on the "nearest enemy," which in this case means Arab governments that cooperate with the US-led system. In his view, Islamist opposition movements will engage the "further away enemies" (meaning the United States and Israel) at a later time.[31]

Despite bin Laden's ideological diatribes against the United States, and even his direct attacks against US power and influence, the nearest enemy continues to be the dominant battleground in the war between systems. At the end of the day, radical Islam will seize upon challenges in the Middle East: the youth bulge, declining economies where wealth and opportunities are concentrated among small elites, lack of political expression in most states, foreign policy crises (e.g. the *Intifada* and the US occupation of Iraq) where the Islamic world believes it is being challenged by the global system, and a future devoid of optimism. In the words of Moroccan Islamist Abdul Sallam Yassin, both "West and East have failed. The future is Islam."[32] The pervasiveness of Islamism, which even in its moderate form advocates a unity between religious and political life, means that until the global system shows its ability to benefit states of the non-functioning gap, the Arab street will be a willing audience for Islamism. As leading Egyptian journalist Muhammad Hasanein Heikal notes, "Only Islam makes sense, is authentic" to the Arab street.[33]

Bridging the Gap: The Struggle Across the Middle East

From a geostrategic perspective, these areas include a variety of states across the region where Islamists are actively engaged in attempting to instill their vision of a *sharia*-based Islamic *umma*. Currently, radical Islamists do not wield complete control in any state. The only state that comes close is Iran, but even Iran is caught in the struggle between religious fundamentalists and moderates who seek to modernize their country and bring to it some of the benefits of globalization. A second category of states is those in which the leaders have attempted to strike bargains with their nation's indigenous Islamist elements in order to remain in power, such as Egypt, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia. Finally, there are also states whose governments have chosen to restrict or even eliminate all Islamist elements from gaining enough power, influence, and authority to establish themselves as a true force for change, such as Algeria, Tunisia, and Turkey.

A further complicating factor is the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian and wider Arab-Israeli conflict, which is truly about land and not religion or ideology, counter to what the Islamists would have us believe. This aspect represents a true conundrum for US Middle East policy, as it presents an opportunity for Islamists to encroach in an area that allows them to sway the opinion of the Arab street toward their ideology. Bin Laden's attempt to hijack the Israeli-Palestinian conflict for his own purposes, adding the removal of the "Zionists" from Arab territory as one of al Qaeda's stated goals, illustrates clearly his attempt to develop a clash of civilizations.

If the United States is to be victorious in the Global War on Terrorism, it must not allow the situation to devolve into Huntington's simplistic, apocalyptic vision of a clash of civilizations. Instead, the United States must understand the implications of its leadership in the global system, and how to use this position to demonstrate to moderates in the Islamic world why they should join us rather than attempt to beat us.

NOTES

1. Philip Seib, "News Media and the Clash of Civilizations," *Parameters*, 34 (Winter 2004-05), 71-85.

2. Niall Ferguson makes a key point by suggesting "it is a mistake to characterize Islamists as "Islamo-Fascists," and it is better to think of them as "Islamo-Bolshevists committed to a revolution and reordering of the world along anti-capitalist lines" in "Sinking Globalization," *Foreign Affairs*, 84 (March/April 2005), 75.

3. This is a common construct regarding international relations. See: Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society* (New York: Columbia, 1977); Kenneth N. Waltz, *Man, the State, and War: A Theoretical Analysis* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1959); Alexander Wendt, "Anarchy is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics," *International Organization*, 46 (Spring 1992); Robert Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1984); and Kenneth A. Oye, ed., *Cooperation under Anarchy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1986).

4. This is part of the basis for Hegemonic Stability Theory. See: Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1982); and Duncan Snidal, "The Limits of Hegemonic Stability Theory," *International Organization*, 39 (Autumn 1985).

5. G. John Ikenberry, "The Myth of Post-Cold War Chaos," *Foreign Affairs*, 75 (May/June 1996).

6. Thomas Friedman. "National Strategies and Capabilities for a Changing World: Globalization and National Security," luncheon address, 31st Annual IFPA–Fletcher Conference on National Security and Policy, Washington, D.C., 15 November 2000.

7. Ibid.

8. Thomas Barnett, "The Pentagon's New Map," *Esquire*, March 2003.

9. This is the main argument of the hegemonic stability theory. Changes to the international system occur when the hegemon is unable or unwilling to provide the public goods necessary to maintain the system. A weak hegemon may be assisted in maintaining the system by other states who derive benefit from that system, or be challenged by others who do not benefit, or who wish to assume the role of the hegemon. See Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*, and Snidal, "The Limits of Hegemonic Stability Theory."

10. *Sharia* (Islamic law) was codified in the eighth and ninth centuries, after the Abbasids seized the Islamic caliphate from the Umayyads. *Sharia* variants exist according to jurists' compilations and interpretations in different geographic areas: the *Hanafi* School (least strict) in Turkey, Central Asia, and India; *Shafi* in Iran and the coastal Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean areas; *Maliki* in North and Sub-Saharan Africa; *Hanbali* (most strict) in Saudi Arabia.

11. Charles Hirschkind, "What is Political Islam?" *Middle East Report*, No. 205 (October-December 1997), p. 14.

12. Koran, Sura 2: verse 190. Most *sharia* schools of law consider jihad an obligation if unbelievers begin hostilities. See also Desmond Stewart, *Early Islam* (New York: Time-Life Books, 1967): "Christ had taught Christians to forgive their persecutors and turn the other cheek; Muhammad, in contrast, had urged his followers to fight for Islam" (pp. 39-40).

13. See Theodore H. von Laue, *The World Revolution of Westernization: The Twentieth Century in Global Perspective* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1987), for his views of cultures and their abilities to assimilate modern ideas and technology.

14. See Alisdair McIntyre, *After Virtue* (South Bend, Ind.: Notre Dame Univ. Press, 1984), for a comprehensive review of the philosophical path taken by the West, with a critique mirroring many of the Islamists' complaints.

15. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Christianity in a Secularized World* (New York: Crossroad, 1989), p. 57.

16. See Seizaburo Sato, "The Clash of Civilizations: A View from Japan," *The Asteion Magazine* (Okamoto International Affairs Research Institute, Japan), 1996, for a detailed explanation of the West's transition from its classical roots to an industrial order. Rodney Stark's *For the Glory of God* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 2003), examines why science progressed further in Christendom rather than in the Islamic world, providing an explanation for the early impetus toward eventual Western industrialization.

17. Barnett.

18. Nazih Ayubi, *Political Islam: Religion and Politics in the Arab World* (2d ed.; New York: Routledge, 1993), pp. 139-40.

19. Thomas Friedman, "Fighting 'The Big One,'" *The New York Times*, 24 August 2003.

20. Ibid.

21. Daniel Pipes and Graham Fuller, "Combating the Ideology of Radical Islam," Special Policy Forum Report, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 10 April 2003.

22. The concept of pansurgency was conceived by Dr. Ilana Kass of the National Defense University for a briefing to the White House and Congress. Dr. Kass defines pansurgency as the organized movement of transnational actors seeking to overthrow values, cultures, or societies on a global level through subversion and armed conflict with an ultimate goal of establishing a new world order.

23. Michael B. Oren, *Six Days of War: June 1967 and the Making of the Modern Middle East* (Oxford, Eng.: Oxford Univ. Press, 2002), p. 152.

24. Mamoun Fandy, "Where's the Arab Media's Sense of Outrage?" *The Washington Post*, 4 July 2004, p. B04.

25. Dilip Hiro, *War Without End: The Rise of Islamist Terrorism and Global Response* (rev., 2d.ed.; London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 59-60.

26. Emmanuel Sivan, *Radical Islam: Medieval Theology and Modern Politics* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Press, 1990).

27. Sayyid Qutb, *Islam and the Problems of Civilization*, quoted in Judith Miller, *God Has Ninety-Nine Names: Reporting from a Militant Middle East* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), pp. 62-63.

28. Hiro, p. 67.

29. Miller, p. 63.

30. Ibid., p. 49.

31. Emmanuel Sivan, "The Holy War Tradition in Islam," *Orbis*, 42 (Spring 1998), 171-94.

32. Mahmud A. Faksh, *The Future of Islam in the Middle East: Fundamentalism in Egypt, Algeria, and Saudi Arabia* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1997), p. 25.

33. Ibid.