

President Clinton rejects the 'clash of civilizations'

by Jeffrey Steinberg

The Clinton administration has made public its disagreement with Trilateral Commission ideologue Samuel Huntington's apocalyptic vision of a future "clash of civilizations" and counterposed its own efforts at securing a lasting Middle East peace as the alternative.

Rejecting Huntington's widely circulated thesis that the post-Cold War era will be dominated by decades of confrontation between the West and an emerging Asian "Confucian-Islamic" monolith, the White House leadership has attempted in recent weeks to chart a course of foreign policy action that has many leading figures in the Chatham House-New York Council on Foreign Relations axis in a dither. The reason for the consternation is that Clinton foreign policy, even where misguided, seems to have broken free from the axioms of British-devised geopolitics.

During the week of Aug. 15, Henry Kissinger, a self-confessed agent of the British Royal Institute for International Affairs (Chatham House) and the British Foreign Office, assailed Clinton for his July trip to Europe, during which the President announced a new strategic partnership with Germany to build a Eurasian alliance on the basis of economic development. Kissinger, whom Lyndon LaRouche assessed as "on the way down" if not "on the way out" as an influential voice in public affairs, whined that Clinton's new focus on Russia and Germany would "wound" France (which Henry does not care about) and Great Britain (which owns him). For the past century, British geopoliticians have treated the kind of Eurasian development plan augured by the new Clinton policy-thrust, as a "casus belli."

Huntington's geopolitical fantasy

In the Summer 1993 issue of the CFR's *Foreign Affairs* magazine, Harvard professor Samuel Huntington penned a

long-winded essay entitled "Clash of Civilizations?" In Huntington's version of post-Cold War geopolitics, he forecast inevitable violent conflict between the United States and Europe on the one side (perhaps including Russia), and an Asian-Middle Eastern bloc rallying beneath the banner of a hybrid "Confucian-Islamic" fundamentalism.

Huntington argued that "differences among civilizations are not only real; they are basic. . . . These differences are the product of centuries. They will not soon disappear. . . . The interactions among peoples of different civilizations enhance the civilization-consciousness of people that, in turn, invigorates differences and animosities stretching or thought to stretch back deep in history."

Since the publication of the Huntington article, an international debate has been sparked over his thesis of future "holy warfare" against the West. But a new dimension was added to that debate on July 31, when the *Washington Post* published a commentary by President Clinton's National Security Adviser Anthony Lake, debunking the "clash" theory.

Islam not the enemy image

Lake's piece was particularly significant because it was published one day before Jordan's King Hussein and Israel's Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin met with President Clinton at the White House to formalize the inclusion of Jordan in the Middle East peace process, set in motion one year ago with the Israel-PLO accord.

Lake minced no words in his critique of Huntington's latest theory, writing:

"It's important not to view our involvement either as a struggle for mastery over the Middle East or a 'clash of civilizations' pitting western values against Islamic and other religious traditions. Indeed, the Clinton administration

strongly disagrees with the view that there is no common ground for understanding between 'the West and the rest,' that the United States, as the sole remaining superpower, must be drawn to a new crusade against Islam.

"In the Middle East as throughout the world, there is indeed a basic divide. But the fault line runs not between 'civilizations' or religions. It lies instead between oppression and responsive government, between isolation and openness, moderation and extremism. It knows no distinction by race, creed or geography. . . . And the dramatic global events of the past four years have shown that this language can transcend the past and transform the future."

Lake then addressed the issue of Islam. Even before the collapse of the Iron Curtain, a number of Cold War ideologues, Huntington included, had been arguing that the United States needed a new "enemy image." Many argued that Islam should be viewed the new "enemy."

Lake's commentary rejected this feature of the Huntington thesis most explicitly: "Nor must a renewed emphasis on traditional values in the Islamic world inevitably lead to conflict with the West or with democratic principles. These values—of devotion to family and society, to faith and good works—are not alien to our own experience. That so many people in the Middle East look to religion, to Islam, is neither unusual nor unique. This is a universal quest. Islam is not the issue."

Citing the Serbian genocide against the predominantly Muslim population of Bosnia, Lake reiterated: "Today, the real conflicts that offend the conscience of the world are manifestly not 'conflicts of civilization.'"

Trying to match words with deeds

Sources close to the Clinton White House have told *EIR* that the Lake article was an accurate reflection of the policy being pursued by the administration, which extends beyond the Middle East peace negotiations. The U.S. efforts to develop working ties to the moderate faction within the Algerian Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), while at the same time keeping up pressure on the Iranian regime, are cited as examples of how the administration is moving to isolate violent Islamists from more rational elements, and to avoid any efforts to draw the United States into a broad attack on "fundamentalist Islam."

President Clinton is personally aware of the pitfalls of the Huntington "clash with Islam" doctrine and is anxious to avoid falling into that trap, according to several sources interviewed for this article.

The administration's approach to resolving the Korea crisis is another relevant case. Huntington speaks for a large group of would-be geopolitical strategists, led by Gerald Segal of the London International Institute for Strategic Studies, who wanted to see the North Korean nuclear weapons controversy turned into a huge foreign policy crisis for Clinton. Segal, who writes for *Foreign Affairs* magazine on Asia



National Security Adviser Anthony Lake (left) has taken exception to the "Clash of Civilizations" thesis of the Trilateral Commission's Samuel Huntington.

policy, has assailed President Clinton for his failure to provoke a "clash" with North Korea in order to accelerate the destabilization of mainland China (presumably the "Confucian" side of Huntington's anti-western monolith).

Follies

To be sure, there are weaknesses and follies in the Clinton foreign policy agenda. The administration has failed to adequately counter some of the attacks that have been leveled over its support for the draft program of the upcoming United Nations Cairo conference. Although an understanding has been reached between the institutions of the U.S. presidency and the papacy over a range of pressing policy issues, the Clinton stand on Cairo has opened the door to a potential isolation of Washington from the promising progress toward a Christian-Islamic dialogue at precisely the moment that the Clinton White House is trying to steer a tricky path toward some policy agreements with Islamist factions.

Between Aug. 8 and Aug. 11, the Vatican press office, and then the Islamic Studies Center of Al-Azhar University in Egypt, one of the most venerated centers of Sunni Muslim orthodoxy in the Islamic world, came out with convergent denunciations of aspects of the genocidal draft program of action for the U.N. International Conference on Population and Development, on Sept. 5-13 in Cairo.

The administration's failure to respond to this emerging alliance against the enemies of humanity is a particularly dangerous irony. Given the President's strong antipathy to British-inspired geopolitical dogmas like Huntington's "clash of civilizations," he is going to need a firm alliance with the Vatican and with reasonable forces within Islam if he is to succeed in his goal.