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THE CRITIQUE OF «CLASH OF CIVILIZATIONS»[1]

This article deals with critical conceptual problems related to defining the concept «civilization» by Samuel Huntington.

Keywords: civilization, division, determines, argument, critique, social sciences.

В статье рассматриваются критические концептуальные проблемы, связанные определением понятия цивилизация автором которого является известный политолог Самуэль Хантингтон.

Ключевые слова: цивилизация, деление, опредление, аргумент, критика, общественные науки.

After the end of the Cold War, new visions about the future of world politics proliferated. Among them Samuel Huntington's article about the clash of civilizations has been one of the most popular. In this seminal work a civilization is defined as "the highest cultural grouping of people." Economic modernization and social change weakens local identities and thus creates conditions for the emergence of civilizations. Because the values in these civilizations are so disparate and the world is becoming a smaller place, it is argued that, the clash of the values and interests of eight major civilizations becomes inevitable. According to Huntington, micro-level conflicts occur between groups along the fault lines between civilizations, while macro-level struggle will happen between the states from different civilizations. The crux of Huntington's argument is that the primary causes of conflicts will not be ideological or economic. "The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural."[2] Developing his argument in this vein, he derives certain implications and suggestions for Western policy, which has made the article a subject of intense controversy since the time of its publication.

This essay (article) does not undertake the venturesome task of analyzing the article in the realm of ethics, its pessimistic vision about the future of the world and its simplistic views of non-Western parts of the world. Instead, it endeavors to gauge the article's social-scientific value using three benchmarks. For brevity, we will peruse Huntington's core statements without going into details. First, we will look at how clearly and consistently the concepts were defined. Then, we will show examples of ambiguities and fallacies in Huntington's logic that makes his later hypotheses untenable. Lastly, some empirical findings will be cited to demonstrate that Huntington's predictions are not supported by research. While Huntington includes some information that covers a part of the reality in international affairs, his interpretation of that reality is inadequate and he fails to convince its careful readers because of his ill-defined concepts and biased usage of data.

If civilization is defined according to certain criteria in one case, the same criteria must be used consistently in all cases covered by this conceptual framework. However, in the article, the criteria for the definition of civilizations seem to be chosen arbitrarily. In one case the criterion seems to be religion, but in another it is common history. If we look at the list of civilizations provided by Huntington we see this clearly: Western, Confucian, Japanese, Islamic, Hindu, Slavic-Orthodox, Latin American. Interestingly, in the cases of Western and Latin American it is difficult to understand why they belong to different civilizations. No reason is given for not calling Japanese civilization Shinto civilization according to the widespread religion practiced in Japan. What is more, there is no place in Huntington's classification for countries like Cambodia, Mongolia, and Thailand, with large Buddhist populations. Even if we accept a common history as a criterion we can hardly say that Slavic-Orthodox peoples of Serbs, Macedonians, and Bulgarians have much in common with Ukrainians, Russians in Kazakhstan and Russia. If we take common values as the criteria to define civilizations then it becomes necessary to study the values of communities in a civilization. For example, in the case of Islamic civilization it cannot be argued that Kazakhs have same values as Arabs.

By and large, this arbitrary style of defining basic concepts is maintained throughout the article. The perils of such an approach are explained in an article by Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, where they argue that "the social sciences and humanities have surrendered to the word 'identity'."[3] They claim that mere popular usage of a term in daily life and politics does not justify its employment as an analytical category in social sciences. We think Huntington's "civilizational identity" is an archetype of such ill-definition. He used it without providing clear guidelines how to define it, how to find civilizations in real life.[4]

Trying to interpret Huntington's arguments leads us to another vantage point, from which we can evaluate his work. While he selectively mentions major transformations in international affairs to explain why civilizations will clash, in fact, he does not elucidate what the object of clash is, culture or power. While in the first section he clearly states that "the dominating source of conflict will be cultural,"[5] he later adds that "states from differ-

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1 **The article is Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?" Foreign Affairs 72, no. 3 (1993): 22-49; <http://www.jstor.org> (7 February 2012).**
2 **Huntington, "The Clash of Civilisations?" 22.**
3 **Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, "Beyond 'Identity'," Theory and Society 29, no. 1 (2000): 1-2.**
4 **For a more extensive critique of the word 'civilization' see Jack F. Matlock, Jr., "Can Civilizations Clash?" Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society 143, no. 3 (September, 1999): 428-439; <http://www.jstor.org> (7 February 2012).**
5 **Huntington, "The Clash of Civilisations?" 22.**
6 **Ibid., 29.**

ent civilizations compete for relative military and economic power."[6] This results in at least two different interpretations. First is that, states and communities in different civilizations will clash to protect their distinct identities, giving up their particular economic and military interests. Second interpretation is that civilizations share common values, but they will clash for power. We think choosing one substantially changes the logic of argument. If it is power, then it means that two actors from a civilization can have conflicts if their interests contradict. However, Huntington does not explain why cultural conflicts dominate other types of conflicts.

In the example of the statement that "Islam has bloody borders," one can easily see how Huntington uses an incomplete picture of reality to defend his ideas. In fact, many conflicts on the edges of Islamic civilization are not directly related to civilizational issues. For example, the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh has nothing to do with Armenians belonging to the West and Azeris to Islamic world. It is mainly a territorial dispute. Therefore, "Islam has bloody borders," not because it acts as a civilization but because it is a religion which is spread over a larger geographical area in Africa, Asia, and Europe.

Another important shortcoming of Huntington's logic is that his argument is partly a self-fulfilling prophecy, an approach unacceptable in the social sciences. In the last part of the article he outlines the main implications for the West and makes suggestions for Western policy. The author first tries to convince his readers that the clash will occur, but also encourages actors to participate in the clash.[7] It is like suggesting someone to fight because one thinks that people are likely to fight each other in future. This manner of fallacious reasoning is ubiquitous in the article, which makes

it to a great extent a fragile conceptual framework.

In addition to the conceptual and logical shortcomings, many studies demonstrated that Huntington's hypotheses are not supported by empirical evidence. Moreover, some studies show that it is difficult to apply his concepts to reality, to test if his hypotheses are plausible. A study conducted by Jonathan Fox has revealed that civilizational conflicts account for only a minor share of ethnic conflicts both during and after the Cold War.[8] Another investigation by Errol Henderson and Richard Tucker also found no substantiation for Huntington's hypotheses. For example, they have not found any "statistically significant relationship between civilizational membership and interstate war."[9] Bruce M. Russett, John R. Oneal, and Michaelene Cox also found that "civilizations do not define the fault lines along which international conflict occurs." Instead, common values of democracy and economic cooperation turn out to be more relevant.[10] Their research also showed that conflicts between civilizations did not increase in the post-Cold War period. Jonathan Benthall claims that the difference between values of Islamic and Judaeo-Christian traditions may not be as great as described by Huntington, according to his research on Muslim charitable practices.[11] In the light of these studies, it is possible to sum up that, because of the fuzziness of the concepts and the hypotheses, their refutation by empirical research is not surprising.

Admittedly, articles in the social sciences cannot be as precise as in the natural sciences in its assumptions, methodologies and predictions. However, we have certain standards to guide our thinking about social realities that surround us. When scientific knowledge is produced, the necessary measurements

must accompany it, to let consumers of that knowledge judge for themselves if it is true or false. This is only possible with a certain minimum of clarity and consistency.

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