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Civilization As Instrument of World Order?
The Role of the Civilizational Paradigm in the Absence of a Balance of Power

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Exposé

“Civilization” has become a buzzword in contemporary discourse about global affairs. What is called “international order” – a system of power-centered interaction between states – has always invited the creation of “legitimizing tools” by those who had an interest in the preservation of a given *distribution* of power. The very stability of world order is, *inter alia*, a function of its legitimation. While in an earlier era – in particular that of the “Holy Alliance” – religion was the determining factor in the discourse of legitimation, it has been gradually succeeded – as far as the dominant Western civilization is concerned – by secularized ideologies and, more recently, the paradigm of “civilization.”

As long as world order was characterized by a *balance* of power – such as the bipolar one during the Cold War –, each rival for global hegemony rooted its claim to power on a set of human values and abstract norms that were perceived, and propagated, as being superior to those of the other. After the sudden – and mostly unexpected – end of that system in the course of the events of 1989, ideological rivalry was followed by a claim to *civilizational supremacy* on the part of the only remaining global power.

To suit the aspiration towards global rule in the framework of the now unipolar order, a new *antagonistic discourse* has been created along civilizational lines. In the *absence* of a balance of power (at least insofar as political and military affairs are concerned), the global hegemon has embarked upon a self-proclaimed civilizational mission.

We shall analyze the “logic of self-affirmation” which is inherent in this post-ideological discourse and identify the areas in which the West claims civilizational superiority. Referring to the emphasis on democracy, human rights, the rule of law, etc., we shall try to understand how the supposed superiority is instrumentalized for the purpose of “reinventing” other civilizations, which effectively means subjecting them to the standards of the dominant civilization.

The paradigm of the “clash of civilizations” which was advanced when the old bipolar order collapsed gains new significance in this hegemonial context: not only does it generate a kind of enemy stereotype that any hegemon feels compelled to advance to make his rule appear indispensable within its own realm; it helps mobilize the respective population for the imposition of *one* particular world view, claimed as being of *universal* nature, upon all the others, thus absorbing their distinct civilizational identities.

Associated with the politically dominant system, “civilization” – as a collective world view with a specific hierarchy of values and perceptions of life – is fast becoming a tool for commanding obedience from the part of potential competitors for global influence. The latter are denied *civilizational equality* (in the sense of the enjoyment of equal rights of self-realization in their interaction with all other civilizations) and are expected to accept being *redefined* (“reinvented”) against their will, on the basis of the norms of the dominant civilization.

We shall try to exemplify these structural facts by reference to the development of Islamic-Western relations in the absence of a global power balance and shall pose the question as to the *credibility* as well as *sustainability* of a “new” world order based on a doctrine of civilizational supremacy.

(I)

The unipolar power constellation at the beginning of the 21st century appears having brought about a paradigm change in regard to the legitimation of world order. In view of the predominant power's claim to civilizational supremacy, which is documented not only in public relations, but also military campaigns, we intend to analyze that country's strategy of "commanding obedience" vis-à-vis an increasingly "restive" world.

With the disappearance of the political and ideological rivalry of the Cold War and the collapse of the bipolar balance of power, "civilization" has become the buzzword in contemporary discourse about world order, and in particular about the *reshaping* of that order.¹ Since the beginning of the century, the world has witnessed the renaissance of a "holy alliance" in secular form whereby the civilizational paradigm – with the fundamental values associated with it – has replaced that of religion. The demands for the reshaping of the global order are now made in the name of an "international community" that is exclusively defined according to criteria set by the self-proclaimed architects of that order. This state of affairs, and in particular the hegemonial discourse associated with it, necessitates an analysis of the underlying paradigm of world order.

The often diagnosed "moralization" of international relations² has to be understood in the wider context of the question of global order. In the absence of a balance of power, "Western values" – with their inherent exclusivist interpretation of democracy, human rights, the rule of law³ – are declared of transcultural relevance and instrumentalized for the purpose of commanding obedience from the part of the global polity. Morality has indeed become an instrument of world order whereby "Western civilization" has presented itself as the paradigmatic one. It is a characteristic feature of this hegemonial system that the social and political order in entire regions (such as the Middle East) is proclaimed as requiring *remodeling* according to those values. The tone has been set, among others, by US Secretary

¹ On the relation between world order and civilization see also Hans Köchler, "The Dialogue of Civilizations and the Future of World Order. The 43rd MSU Foundation Day Address," in: *Mindanao Journal*, Vol. XXVIII (2005), online publication, Mindanao State University, http://www.msu.edu.ph/mindanaojournal/pdf/mj1_2005.pdf.

² Cf., *inter alia*, Helmut Dubiel, *Global Civil Society As A Community of Memory*. University of Michigan, Center for European Studies, Conversations on Europe, 5 November 2001, <http://www.umich.edu/~iinet/euc/PDFs/2002%20Papers/Dubiel.pdf>. – For a general description of the tendency in the context of the development of international law see Sienho Yee, "Towards an International Law of Co-progressiveness," in: Sienho Yee, *Towards an International Law of Co-progressiveness*. Leiden: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2004, pp. 1-26.

³ For an analysis of the underlying doctrinary assumptions see Hans Köchler, *Democracy and Human Rights*. Studies in International Relations, XV. Vienna: International Progress Organization, 1990.

of State Madeleine Albright who, in a public debate at Ohio State University in 1998, referred to the United States as the “indispensable nation.”⁴

In order to unravel the discourse of legitimation underlying the claim to civilizational supremacy, which is a corollary of global dominance, we first have to clarify the notion of “world order” itself.

In the context of our paper, we understand “order” as a neutral system of relations with distinct rules that may vary according to the areas of social life to be governed. For the purpose of this analysis, we provisionally define “world order” as a system, comprising mankind as a whole, of interdependent relations between various collective actors, whether those are states as subjects of international law, economic entities (national as well as transnational), peoples in the socio-cultural sense (i.e. “nations”), or specific social groupings that are formed beyond the confines of ethnicity or religion. Most frequently, “world order” has been referred to as a system of relations between states whereby the rules (more specifically: legal norms) are set and enforced in materially and structurally different ways, whether unilaterally or multilaterally – the overriding goal being that of stability.

In our general orientation, we follow the concise definition suggested by Hedley Bull who conceives world order as “those patterns or dispositions of human activity that sustain the elementary or primary goals of social life among mankind as a whole”⁵ and distinguishes it from international order as “order among states,” understood simply as groups of people.⁶ The latter, according to Bull, can be defined as pattern or disposition of international activity that sustains the elementary goals of the society of states.⁷ For the purpose of this analysis, we would like to refer to Bull’s enumeration of these goals which helps us understand the specific role of “civilization” in the instrumental sense we shall try to work out here. Those specific goals are: (a) the “preservation of the system and society of states itself,” (b) “maintaining the independence or external sovereignty of individual states,” (c) the “maintenance of peace in the sense of the absence of war,” and (d) the “limitation of violence resulting in death or bodily harm.”⁸

⁴ *Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright, Secretary of Defense William S. Cohen, and National Security Advisor Samuel R. Berger – Remarks at Town Hall Meeting, Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio, February 18, 1998. As released by the Office of the Spokesman, February 20, 1998. U.S. Department of State.*

⁵ Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society. A Study of Order in World Politics*. 3rd ed. Houndmills (UK)/New York: Palgrave, 2002, p. 19.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Op. cit.*, p. 16.

⁸ *Op. cit.*, pp. 16-18.

In view of Bull's distinction, we understand "international order" as a facet of "world order," albeit the most important one. When we refer to world order in this paper, we mean "international order" as defined above. The power of states is the main structural element of this order. Thus, world order, as understood in this context, reflects the global power constellation at a given time, whether this is a unipolar, bipolar or multipolar one.

Ideally, the stability of the order is ensured through the enforcement of legal norms agreed upon among the community of states ("international rule of law") – which is the case when a balance of power, whether bipolar or multipolar, exists. In the absence of a balance of power, the cohesion of the global order is simply maintained by acts commanding obedience, including the use of military force. In a unipolar system like the contemporary one such acts of power are not based on norms generally agreed upon – a situation which challenges the priority of the law as framework of the conduct of international affairs. Stability of a given order and legality of the means for achieving or maintaining that order are two entirely different matters.

Stability of world order is, *inter alia*, a function of its *legitimation*. History tells us that those who considered themselves, in different epochs and under different political and socio-economic conditions, as guarantors of the global order, thus claiming the role of "enforcers," have resorted to either *religion* – as in the era of the crusades –, *ideology* – as during the Cold War –, or *civilization* – as in the colonial period –, or a combination of these, when they felt a need of justification for the exercise of their vital interests beyond their borders. The explicit goals of the enforcers of world order – namely the exercise of power and the assertion of national interests – have rarely been declared openly; they have almost always been veiled in idealistic language. In the context of world order – and according to the logic of its enforcers –, a legitimation strategy, if it is to be effective, has to provide a cover for undeclared goals that would otherwise not be acceptable in the eyes of those whose obedience is required to guarantee the stability of a given order.⁹

In European history since the Middle Ages we basically can discern four schemes according to which the predominant powers of the time tried to assert their authority for the sake of what they declared a "just" world order:

⁹ As far as American-style democracy is concerned, Walter Lippmann has analyzed the social techniques of what he called the "manufacture of consent." Those may now be applied at the global level. (Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion. With a New Introduction by Michael Curtis*. New Brunswick [NJ]/London: Transaction Publishers, 1991. Reprint; originally published: New York: Macmillan, 1922.)

- (a) From the Middle Ages up to the 19th century the dominant powers resorted to religion as basic source of legitimation of the existing order and of the expansion of their domain. The crusades against the Muslims in the Holy Land have been the most drastic expression of a strategy of enforcing an imperial order in the name of God. The rules of that era's world order were proclaimed, on behalf of the Supreme Being, by the self-declared guardians of the Christian faith, something which excluded in and of itself any form of co-operation among equals (as far as non-Christian nations were concerned). The purported religious motive was also apparent in the compact of the 19th century's Holy Alliance and in the acts of interference – indeed early forms of what today is termed “humanitarian intervention” – conducted by European powers on the territory of the Ottoman Empire.¹⁰ Religion also served as legitimation tool for the European conquests in the Western and Eastern hemispheres; those expeditions negated the rights of indigenous civilizations in an absolute sense, including the most brutal use of force.
- (b) The rationale of the European powers' colonial rule – particularly from the 19th to the 20th centuries – was based on a combination of Christian missionary doctrine and a supposed civilizational mission (somehow related to the discourse of European Enlightenment). This hybrid form of legitimation of the rule of European imperial powers was only disposed of following the upheavals of the Second World War.
- (c) In the bipolar era of the Cold War – during the second half of the 20th century – the global claim to power by the two major competitors for the role of enforcer of the international order was based on ideological premises. Their secularized versions of imperial legitimation were characterized by competing views of the dignity of man and conflicting versions of human rights, including mutually exclusive political ideals. The antagonistic systems of “socialism” (communism) and “capitalism” determined a balance of power that only ended with the collapse of one competitor's imperial domain. In a certain sense, both rivals claimed for

¹⁰ For details see Hans Köchler, *Humanitarian Intervention in the Context of Modern Power Politics. Is the Revival of the Doctrine of "Just War" Compatible with the International Rule of Law?* Studies in International Relations, XXVI. Vienna: International Progress Organization, 2001.

themselves a civilizational mission according to which their respective ideology represented a higher level of humanity.

- (d) At the beginning of the 21st century a paradigm change appears taking hold again. With the end of the Cold War era, brought about by the events of 1989, a unipolar world order has emerged, at least as regards the power-centered relations between the nation-states. What has euphemistically – and possibly prematurely – been termed the “New World Order” in the years following the collapse of communism,¹¹ has been idealized by references to a supposed superiority of the Western vision of man, including human rights and the economic and political system of liberalism. In the absence of a balance of power, the dominant actor increasingly resorts to the propagation of its own civilization as a system of values by which humanity is supposedly expressed more fully than in other civilizational systems. The “Western” way of life, portrayed as superior in terms of human dignity, is considered as being of exemplary nature. This particular civilization is used as source of legitimacy for the policies, including economic as well as military measures, of the global hegemon. In the meantime, and particularly since the events of the year 2001, the emphasis on the norms inherent in this civilization has acquired the form of a missionary ideology the essence of which is the belief in a *dichotomy of good and evil*. In the newspeak of our unipolar world, “civilization” has effectively taken the role of religion, i.e. filled the vacuum left by religion in the West’s secularized environment. The construct of the “axis of evil,” for instance, serves to demonstrate the new – secularized¹² – moral antagonism on which the dominant power bases its hegemonial claim.

(II)

Before we proceed with the analysis of the civilizational paradigm of world order, we have to clarify the use of the term “civilization.” For the purpose of this essay, we define

¹¹ For details see Hans Köchler, *Democracy and the New World Order*. Studies in International Relations, XIX. Vienna: International Progress Organization, 1993.

¹² However, this dichotomy is secularized only up to a certain extent. The phraseology used by the President of the United States ever more frequently, and even more so since the Iraq war of 2003, contains open references to Christian religion.

“civilization” in the sense of a universal world view and underlying comprehensive system of values that comprises “culture” as a sub-category. We do not understand these two terms in the sense of an earlier (particularly German) discourse on “culture” and “civilization,” namely as two distinct forms of human self-realization.¹³ We follow the description used by Samuel Huntington according to whom civilization means “the highest cultural grouping of people and the broadest level of cultural identity people have short of that which distinguishes humans from other species.”¹⁴

In the context of the unipolar world order referred to under (d) above, all civilizations – with their eventually competing claims to universality – are measured against the standard of the dominating (Western) civilization. The latter’s value system is declared as of paradigmatic nature. The underlying rationale is one of “self-immunization,” which is obvious in the following circular scheme: on the one hand, Western civilization serves – i.e. is instrumentalized – as a source of legitimacy of the international order enforced by the global hegemon; on the other hand, the power of the dominant actor commands acceptance of that very civilization. Although this is not a *circulus vitiosus* in the sense of formal logic, it is one that affects societal credibility and that has been at the roots of an increasing number of international confrontations. The “clash of civilizations” Western intellectuals have begun talking about shortly after the end of the Cold War may well have its origin in this circular scheme.

The logic of self-affirmation, inherent in this essentially Eurocentric position, is accompanied by a strategy of “civilizational expansion” which can be interpreted in analogy to the colonial expansionism of the 19th and early 20th centuries. Unlike in previous periods, the guarantor of the world order is – at least in official terms – not conveying a *religious* message, but claiming a (secularized) *civilizational* mission, making secularism the new religion.

With notable exceptions in the 16th and 17th centuries, religion was a cohesive element of Western (essentially European) order internally and a tool of imperial order externally. Such was the role of Christianity up to the 19th century. It helped legitimize colonial expansion, including rule over the Muslim world; a doctrine of religious and moral supremacy

¹³ In German sociological terminology “culture” is often understood as totality of a society’s knowledge, religious beliefs, expressions of art, etc. The realm of culture is distinguished from the material means by which the respective culture is realized; “civilization” is understood as the sum total of these means, i.e. in a mere technical or instrumental sense.

¹⁴ Samuel Huntington, “The Clash of Civilizations?,” in: *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 72, No. 3, Summer 1993, p. 24.

was instrumental in stabilizing that era's international order in favour of the European powers.¹⁵

In the secularized Western system of today, civilization – i.e. civilizational doctrine – has quite obviously replaced religion as tool of global hegemony. The Western understanding – or self-interpretation – of its worldview in the sense of an “enlightened” civilization, based on specific anthropological assumptions (which are not necessarily universal), serves the purpose of legitimizing and, subsequently, stabilizing an increasingly fragile global order: an ever more complex system of relations between states and non-state actors in which different cultures and civilizations exist simultaneously without an explicit consensus on the mode of co-existence. The submission to Western supremacy (considered essential for global stability) is induced by an insistence on civilizational superiority. Unlike as purported by commentators in the West, that consent is not obtained in a space of free and open discourse or “dialogue.” Walter Lippmann's much earlier theory of the “manufacture of consent,” although not designed for a transnational polity, might lead the researcher into the right direction.¹⁶

A long-term strategy of reshaping the globe – i.e. other civilizations – according to the Western model is at the roots of major foreign policy projects of the United States and the United Kingdom in particular. (To a lesser degree, this is also the case with the collective foreign policy and security agenda of the European Union.) The undeclared goal appears to be that of absorption – or “amalgamation” – of other civilizations through a form of political domination.

In the unipolar world order of today, this hegemonial claim is backed up by military force – when and where the leading power deems it appropriate. After the end of the Cold War, the global interventionist policy of the United States is veiled in the robe of a civilizational mission. The actual military hegemony is indeed legitimized by reference to a supposed superiority of Western values: this constitutes what we call the *vicious circle of self-assertion* of Western civilization at the beginning of the 21st century.¹⁷

Against this background of rationalization of an otherwise indefensible claim to civilizational, political, and military supremacy, the dominant power has embarked on a “global war against terror” in the very name of (Western) civilization. This has had far-

¹⁵ So-called “interventions d'humanité” (humanitarian interventions) were practiced with reference to the supposed civilizational mission of Christianity. For details see Hans Köchler, *The Concept of Humanitarian Intervention in the Context of Modern Power Politics*. Studies in International Relations, XXVI. Vienna: International Progress Organization, 2001, pp. 7ff.

¹⁶ Walter Lippmann, op. cit.

¹⁷ See also Hans Köchler, “The Dialogue of Civilizations and the Future of World Order. The 43rd MSU Foundation Day Address,” loc. cit., p. 5.

reaching repercussions on the position of Islam in the contemporary world order. In many instances, acts of terror are summarily being attributed to Islam as a civilization whereby individual acts of violence are attributed to an entire religion.¹⁸ This has resulted in a distorted image of Islam that in turn is being instrumentalized for “modern” forms of humanitarian intervention.¹⁹

In a kind of “hermeneutical imperialism,” the global hegemon, with increasing self-assertion, claims the power, albeit implicitly, of exegesis of the holy scriptures of another civilization. Western leaders such as the President of the United States or the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom have repeatedly presented themselves as *de facto* interpreters of the Holy Q’uran by publicly defining criteria of “true” – or genuine – Islam.²⁰ This attitude makes honest dialogue between Islam and the West almost impossible. One should not be surprised if fragile co-existence turns into confrontation if one side insists on choosing the partners on the other side – declaring *ex cathedra* who is a “good” Muslim. Engaging in “dialogue” only with partners who are handpicked by the Western political establishment is not only an exercise lacking credibility, but a dangerous undertaking. Such an exclusionary – or discriminatory – strategy has been most obvious in the West’s dealing with the peoples of Palestine, Iran and Iraq in particular.

However, in view of the socio-cultural dynamic in the Muslim world, it is tantamount to a denial of reality if the West – including the European Union as a new, though relatively timid, global actor – tries to arrogate the role of *arbiter* in internal affairs of Muslim countries, supporting, for instance, one religious tendency or political group against the other (as in the cases of Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Palestine, etc.). This attitude of denial is nurtured by a colonial mind that is blinded by the absence of a balance of power in terms of military and media potential. A “colonial mind” will always work in tandem with a “colonized mind,” which implies a policy of *divide et impera*. This is particularly true for the West’s dealings

¹⁸ The confrontations, since September 2005, between Muslims and Western (European) media and governments over the publishing of cartoons that are defamatory of Islam and Prophet Mohammad have drastically demonstrated this arrogant attitude identifying Islam with terrorism. No one should be surprised if the creation of such enemy stereotypes will further fuel the so-called “clash of civilizations.” See the news release: *International Progress Organization condemns anti-Muslim hate propaganda and calls upon European Union to take a firm stand in defense of the rights of all religious communities*. International Progress Organization, Vienna, 6 February 2006/P/RE/19543c-is.

¹⁹ See the lecture by the author: “The Image of Islam in the West.” International Workshop “Images of Islam: Terrorizing the Truth,” Just World Trust (JUST), Penang, Malaysia, 7 October 1995.

²⁰ See, for instance, Tony Blair’s interview for *Newsweek* (3 December 2001) or George W. Bush’s comments on Islam made on 16 October 2001. For details see, *inter alia*, Benedict Brogan and Inigo Gilmore, “Blair urges Islam to wrest back ‘hijacked’ faith,” *Daily Telegraph*, London, 2 November 2001; Robin Millard (Agence France Press), “Blair Praises ‘Moderate’ Islam,” *Arab News*, 12 July 2005; Daniel Pipes, “What’s True Islam? Not for U.S. to Say,” *New York Post*, 26 November 2001; Andrew Davison, “Karol Rove and ‘True’ Islam,” *Common Dreams News Center*, CommonDreams.org, 22 July 2005.

with the Muslim world. Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, former Prime Minister of Malaysia, has most candidly drawn our attention to this reality of an (at least officially) post-colonial world. In his Special Address on Globalization, delivered on the occasion of the Malaysian Human Rights Day 2005, he acknowledged an often ignored reality: “We have gained political independence but for many the minds are still colonised.”²¹

In tandem with the military expeditions in Afghanistan and Iraq, a project of “reinventing” Islam appears to be under way the goal of which is to redefine the core elements of Islam – in terms of religion as well as civilization – according to the criteria and on the basis of the terminology of the Western-Christian tradition. The discourse on a so-called “Euro-Islam” – a secularized version of Islam according to European standards – falls into this patronizing category.²² The notions of “democracy,” “rule of law,” “human rights,” to mention the buzzwords of the new global debate about civilizational renewal and political reform, are introduced in the specific meaning they have acquired in the development of Western civilization, with special emphasis on the contribution of European Enlightenment to their philosophical foundation. Thus, the anthropocentric world view of the West – particularly its highly cherished humanist tradition dating back to the Renaissance period – is not merely propagated in a framework of free and open discourse – “in good faith,” so to speak –, but *imposed* upon the rest of the world, first and foremost that of Islam for part of which the blueprint of a “New Middle East” has been designed. The contribution Muslim civilization has made to the development and clarification of those very principles is neglected – or deliberately overlooked.²³

This quasi-missionary approach has led and will further lead to a cycle of violence that may spin out of control and acquire a global dimension. Action will provoke reaction and the “clash of civilizations,” conjured up by intellectuals and politicians since the end of the Cold War, is about to become a self-fulfilling prophecy.²⁴

²¹ Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, *Special Address on Globalization*. Malaysian Human Rights Day 2005, “Human Rights and Globalization,” Kuala Lumpur, 9 September 2005, published at www.informationclearinghouse.info/article10305.htm, last visited 4 February 2006.

²² On the notion of “Euro-Islam” see, *inter alia*, Bassam Tibi’s books: *Der Islam und Deutschland. Muslime in Deutschland*. Munich: Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, 2000, and *Europa ohne Identität? Leitkultur oder Wertebeligkeit*. Munich: Siedler, 3rd ed. 2002.

²³ On the influence of Muslim civilization on the development of the European mind, in particular the European Renaissance, see Hans Köchler, *Muslim-Christian Ties in Europe. Past, Present & Future*. Penang, Malaysia: Citizens International, 2004.

²⁴ Cf. Hans Köchler, “The Clash of Civilizations Revisited,” in: Hans Köchler and Gudrun Grabher (eds.), *Civilizations: Conflict or Dialogue?* Studies in International Relations, XXIV. Vienna: International Progress Organization, 1999, pp. 15-24.

The “democratization” of Iraq by means of armed force – namely invasion, occupation and colonization through the setting up of social and political structures under the control of the occupiers – is a case in point.²⁵ The “colonization of the mind” is an essential part of this long-term strategy within the framework of the ambitious project of creating a “New Middle East” that is designed to pacify the region on the terms of the Western world.²⁶

Furthermore, there is no point in propagating civilizational dialogue with Islam if the West neglects the justified grievances of Muslims as in the cases of Palestine or Iraq more recently. One simply cannot speak of dialogue while slapping one’s partner in the face. No one should be surprised if the tacit support of the military occupation of Palestine, including the building and extension of settlements, the invasion and occupation of Iraq, the use of forbidden arms such as depleted uranium in Iraq, the torturing and mistreatment of Muslims in jails in the Middle East and elsewhere (some of which are secretly maintained), etc., are interpreted by Muslims in such a sense. A delicate co-existence of the logic of war with the rhetoric of dialogue has been characteristic of the imperial newspeak of the unilaterally declared “New World Order.”

Ironically, the forceful reinvention of another civilization is implemented within the official framework of a “dialogue of civilizations.” This phenomenon of the “split tongue” raises the question as to the integrity and moral credibility of the proclaimed effort at a comprehensive dialogue. In view of the West’s speaking with different voices, it is no surprise that many of those to whom the initiative is addressed have considered this notion as a smokescreen. While lip service is being paid to dialogue and co-operation, the (undeclared) agenda is that of subjugation of one civilization by another – for purposes other than civilizational advancement.²⁷ The credibility problem of the European Union and the United States in their dealing with the Muslim world lies exactly in the insistence on conducting dialogue *on their terms*, i.e. according to the canon of Western values. In that regard, the West is even resorting to measures of censorship of Muslim media as the banning of the Lebanese

²⁵ On the legal aspects of the war on Iraq see Hans Köchler (ed.), *The Iraq Crisis and the United Nations. Power Politics vs. the International Rule of Law. Memoranda and declarations of the International Progress Organization (1990 – 2003)*. Studies in International Relations, XXVIII. Vienna: International Progress Organization, 2004.

²⁶ For details see, *inter alia*, Trudy J. Kuehner, “A New Middle East? A Report of FPRI’s History Institute for Teachers,” in: *The Newsletter of FPRI’s Marvin Wachman Fund for International Education*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (January 2005), Foreign Policy Research Institute, USA, <http://www.fpri.org/footnotes/101.200501.kuehner.newmiddleeast.html>.

²⁷ On the overall geopolitical implications see *The Baku Declaration on Global Dialogue and Peaceful Co-existence among Nations and the Threats Posed by International Terrorism*. International Progress Organization. Baku, Azerbaijan, 9 November 2001.

satellite station *Al-Manar* by the United States²⁸ and the European Union has demonstrated; at the same time, Western countries refuse to take legal measures against acts of blasphemy directed at Islam.²⁹ As far as the European Union is concerned, this puts into question its commitment to genuine dialogue within the framework of the so-called “Barcelona process.”³⁰ The “Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for the Dialogue between Cultures,” established by the European Union, will neither be credible nor effective in its professed agenda of dialogue between the countries and peoples of the Mediterranean basin if it does not address the basic issue of the right of Muslims to express their identity and values without Western censorship.³¹

As far as the Muslim world is concerned, one of the underlying, publicly declared aims of the “educational” approach of the United States and her allies vis-à-vis the Muslim world is to succeed in the self-declared “global war on terror” although, in its generality, this has become a mission impossible. This “war,” perceived by many in the targeted countries as a new crusade, is being waged in a misleading manner and on wrong premises insofar as it deliberately confuses acts of terrorism with acts of resistance against foreign occupation³² and portrays the worldwide military measures, including intelligence operations outside all norms of international law, as a defense of Western civilization, of good against evil.

On the occasion of its 60th anniversary, the United Nations Organization has tried to set the record straight, making it more difficult, at least in terms of international doctrine, to use civilization as a smokescreen for waging imperial wars, particularly those under the label of the “global war on terror” to which there is no end in sight. The UN Security Council, in a resolution adopted on 14 September 2005, emphasized “that continuing international efforts to enhance dialogue and broaden understanding among civilizations, in an effort to prevent the indiscriminate targeting of different religions and cultures, and addressing unresolved regional conflicts and the full range of global issues ..., will contribute to strengthening the

²⁸ “U.S. Bans Al-Manar, Says TV Network Backs Terror.” *The Washington Post*, 22 December 2004, p. A04.

²⁹ Cf. the I.P.O. news release of 6 February 2006, op. cit.

³⁰ On the problematic aspects of the “Barcelona process” see, *inter alia*, Hans Köchler, “U.S.-European Relations and Their Impact on Europe’s Policy vis-à-vis the Mediterranean and the Arab World,” in: *IKIM Journal*, vol. 6, no. 2 (July-December 1998), pp. 1-21.

³¹ According to its statute, the Foundation “will promote the dialogue between cultures” and “knowledge, recognition and mutual respect between the cultures, traditions and values which prevail in the partners.” (Objectives and Tasks, Art. 1) Text published by the European Commission at www.eu.int/comm/external_relations/euomed/euomed_foundation/, last visited 3 February 2006. This formulation evidently implies the recognition of each culture’s (civilization’s) intrinsic value on an equal level.

³² On the problem of the definition of terrorism see Hans Köchler (ed.), *Terrorism and National Liberation*. Studies in International Relations, XIII. Frankfurt a.M./Bern/Paris/New York: Peter Lang, 1988. On the question of terrorism and the global order see also Hans Köchler, “The United Nations, the international rule of law and terrorism,” in: Hans Köchler, *Global Justice or Global Revenge? International Criminal Justice at the Crossroads*. Vienna/New York: Springer, 2003, pp. 321-349.

international fight against terrorism.”³³ A similar emphasis has been made by the United Nations General Assembly which, further to commending efforts at civilizational dialogue as part of a consistent strategy against terrorism,³⁴ reaffirmed the “Global Agenda for Dialogue among Civilizations” and welcomed the “Initiative of the Alliance of Civilizations” announced by the Secretary-General on 14 July 2005.³⁵

It is of crucial importance not to confuse the United Nations’ references to the “fight against terrorism” with the United States’ “global war on terror” – in view of what agenda is subsumed to the latter by its main protagonist. The United Nations Organization must not sacrifice the commitment to mutual respect among all religions and civilizations, resulting from the Purposes and Principles of the Charter, and its system of collective security³⁶ for the sake of accommodating the most influential permanent member in the Security Council. For this reason, the terminology has to be chosen very carefully and the nexus between issues of civilization on the one hand and terrorism on the other must not be construed in a simplistic manner.

Under the conditions of hegemonial rule, “civilization” – in the sense of an emphasis on the supposedly superior values of a singular civilization – has become the prime instrument for commanding obedience to, i.e. for stabilizing the international system. The decision-makers in the West are well aware that the long-term sustainability of today’s global order – as a system of power relations controlled by one major player – depends on the success of the self-declared civilizational mission of the Western world’s predominant power.

The underlying strategy, carefully draped with references to the universality and trans-cultural nature of human rights, democracy, and the rule of law, is one of the Western civilization absorbing all “competing” civilizational identities, particularly that of Islam with its alternative world view and anthropology. The global discourse enacted in connection with the West’s – more specifically: the United States’ – ongoing “restructuring effort” in the Middle East has brought about a climate of public opinion in which other civilizations are deprived of their self-esteem, only being accepted insofar as they are prepared to define – or redefine – themselves and reorganize their hierarchy of values according to the codex of the dominant civilization. The *definitional power*, i.e. the effective capability to set the

³³ Resolution 1624 (2005) adopted by the Security Council at its 5261st meeting, on 14 September 2005.

³⁴ United Nations, General Assembly, Draft Outcome Document, 13 September 2005, Art. 82.

³⁵ Loc. cit., Art. 144.

³⁶ On the challenges to the United Nations system of collective security in today’s unipolar environment see Hans Köchler (ed.), *The Use of Force in International Relation: Challenges to Collective Security*. Studies in International Relations, XXIX. Vienna: International Progress Organization, 2006. (Forthcoming)

civilizational criteria and identify the *fundamental* values of each civilization, rests with the dominant one. Implicitly, other, potentially competing, world views, with differing value systems, are treated as “lesser” civilizations and denied their right to recognition – unless they accept being “reinvented” on the basis of Western values which are, *ex cathedra*, declared as universal.

(III)

This Eurocentric strategy, paired with cultural arrogance which resembles that of the former colonial rulers vis-à-vis their subjects, not only negates what we have characterized as the dialectic of cultural – or civilizational – self-comprehension and self-realization,³⁷ but threatens the stability of the very order the dominant powers are publicly committed to.

As long as the dominant civilization – the one that has acquired the largest potential in terms of economic, military and informational power – insists on a *definitional privilege*, claiming for itself the exclusive right to set the standards by which the “moral legitimacy” of a given civilization is being measured, the world will be confronted with the prospect of a state of permanent confrontation. It may be accurate, as Bernard Lewis argues, that “[e]very dominant civilization has imposed its own modernity in its prime” and that in “every area of human history, modernity, or some equivalent term [such as human rights, democracy /H.K.], has meant the ways, norms, and standards of the dominant and expanding civilization.”³⁸ However, the qualitative difference between the present and earlier such constellations lies in the *global* outreach of the dominant civilization, with a military potential including arms of mass destruction the use of which has been threatened recently by a Western leader. In our era of globality,³⁹ the unilateral insistence on unified “civilizational standards” breeds a climate of a “clash of civilizations” that may not be containable within the confines of merely “cultural”

³⁷ Hans Köchler, *Philosophical Foundations of Civilizational Dialogue. The Hermeneutics of Cultural Self-comprehension Versus the Paradigm of Civilizational Conflict*. International Seminar on Civilizational Dialogue (3rd: 15-17 September 1997: Kuala Lumpur), BP171.5 ISCD. Kertas kerja persidangan / conference papers. Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Library, 1997. – See also Hans Köchler, *Cultural-Philosophical Aspects of International Cooperation. Lecture held before the Royal Scientific Society, Amman-Jordan*. Studies in International Cultural Relations, II. Vienna: International Progress Organization, 1978.

³⁸ Bernard Lewis, “The West and the Middle East,” in: *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 1997, pp. 114-130; p. 129.

³⁹ Former Malaysian Prime Minister Dr. Mahathir Mohamad has drawn our attention to the intrinsic connection between globalization and a neo-colonial, imperial world order. Speaking about the era of European colonialism, he asked: “Would today’s globalisation not result in weak countries being colonised again, new empires created, and the world totally hegemonised?” (Loc. cit.)

disputes – although everyone, at least in declarations for public consumption, tries to distance himself from this confrontational scheme.

The threat to world order as such will only disappear when the predominant global actor ceases to insist on the exemplary nature of its own civilizational model and will give up its strategy of using “civilization” as a tool to de-legitimize different, and potentially competing, world views. This implies that the privileged global power will not anymore try to command obedience by “civilizational subordination,” i.e. will desist from using civilization as instrument of world order. Such an “enlightened” approach requires that civilization will be accepted as a general framework of *world perception* that may be related to different religions and socio-cultural traditions with their specific systems of values and distinct hierarchical order of those values. Under the conditions of a *multipolar* world in terms of civilization,⁴⁰ tolerance, on the basis of mutual respect, is the *conditio sine qua non* of peaceful co-existence not only in the cultural, but also in the political sense. A stable and sustainable world order cannot be envisaged outside a framework of multipolarity.

Each civilization has an intrinsic value that cannot be absorbed by another civilization. The acknowledgment that there can be no “lead civilization” is one of the preconditions of world peace in the era of globality. In that regard, the Islamic civilization – like any other – has to be recognized and respected as a world view *sui generis* instead of as a system to be “reinvented” according to criteria formulated within the framework of another civilization. A civilization’s inclusion of religion – as an integral part of civilizational identity – must not be dismissed as lack of enlightenment. The Western civilization does not possess the right to demand from others to follow it on the path of its specific form of secularization nor has it been able to give the philosophical reasons for such a demand.

Any civilization’s claim to exclusivity and superiority – in the sense of negating the intrinsic value of other civilizations – is a recipe for war. Such an approach negates the very idea of world order as a system of norms agreed upon – on the basis of mutuality – by states and peoples that represent different civilizations. Only acceptance of this basic truth of peaceful co-existence will assure that agreement on fundamental norms which are common to all civilizations can be reached.

⁴⁰ On the dichotomy between unipolarity in terms of powers relations and multipolarity in terms of civilizations see Hans Köchler, “The ‘Clash of Civilizations’: Perception and Reality in the Context of Globalization and International Power Politics,” in: Felix Kalandarishvili et al. (eds.), *Materials of the Tbilisi International Forum “Globalization and Dialogue between Civilizations.”* Tbilisi, Georgia: International Forum “Globalization and Dialogue between Civilizations,” 2004, pp. 62-70.

Under the perspective of universal hermeneutics,⁴¹ the contemporary *Islamic renaissance* is to be seen (as would be the case for any other civilization) as an essential contribution to the emergence of a better balanced world order – one that is not exclusively based on a particular civilizational “model” (with all the fragility of political relations and instability of economic exchange that is inherent in this kind of exclusivism). The historical experience with Eurocentrism, in tandem with colonialism, has sufficiently demonstrated the dangers of such an approach to global stability.

Only civilizational multipolarity can bring about a just and stable world order. In this regard, “civilization” must not be instrumentalized as a tool of forcing obedience to a hegemonial power’s vision of the world. Civilization is a *constituent part* of world order as such – whereby the latter is understood as being based on norms of human dignity and mutual respect that are the fundament of co-existence between distinct perceptions of the world as represented by different civilizations. In our understanding, this is what is meant and aspired to by the *Alliance of Civilizations* launched in July 2005 by the Secretary-General of the United Nations at the initiative of Turkey and Spain.⁴² Only a radical departure from the notion of “dominant civilization” – with all that this entails in terms of political and military hegemony claimed by a self-defined “indispensable nation”⁴³ – will prevent permanent confrontation on a global scale. The unipolar approach which instrumentalizes civilization for the purpose of legitimizing hegemonial rule has to give way to the acknowledgment of civilizational multipolarity as precondition of peace. “Civilization” is not an instrument of world order, but – as an expression of that order’s diversity – an integral element of it.

⁴¹ In the context of this paper, we understand hermeneutics in the sense as defined by Hans-Georg Gadamer (*Hermeneutik I: Wahrheit und Methode. Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik*. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 5th ed. 1986). For the application of this method in the field of civilizational dialogue see the author’s paper: *Philosophical Foundations of Civilizational Dialogue. The Hermeneutics of Cultural Self-Comprehension versus the Paradigm of Civilizational Conflict*, loc. cit.

⁴² “Secretary-General announces launch of ‘Alliance of Civilizations’ aimed at bridging divides between societies exploited by extremists.” United Nations, *Press Release*, SG/SM/10004, 14 July 2005.

⁴³ See the statement (February 1998) of U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, loc. cit.