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The Social and Material Construction of Civilizations in International Relations: the 'Muslim World' in American Foreign Policy after 9/11

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Max Weber Programme

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Abstract

This working paper engages theoretically and empirically with the emerging field of civilizational analysis in international relations (IR). It divides the civilizational turn in IR into four developing lines of research: 'civilizational dynamics'; 'inter-civilizational ethics'; 'deconstructing civilization/s'; and 'civilizational constructions'. The paper argues that out of these four lines of research, 'civilizational constructions' appears to be not only the least developed but also a highly promising one. This line of research moves the ongoing debate beyond the current overwhelming focus on whether civilizations exist and matter, or not, in international relations. A 'civilizational constructions' line of research sheds instead much needed light on how emerging forms of civilizational-based thinking are contributing to socially and materially construct civilizations as meaningful entities in world politics by embedding them in new international practices and institutions. The empirical import of a 'civilizational constructions' line of research is offered in an analysis of American foreign policy. The case study explores how in the aftermath of 9/11, the "Muslim world" asserted itself not only as a civilizational strategic frame of reference in the consciousness of American policymakers, but also as a civilizational organizing principle of American foreign policy practices and institutions.

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Introduction

Non-state actors, states and international organizations are increasingly talking and acting *as if* civilizations existed and mattered, in multiple forms and ways, in world politics. As Fabio Petito argues, "civilizations, defined in a fundamentally *culturalist-religious* sense" appear to be reasserting themselves "as *strategic frames of reference,* not as direct protagonists, of international politics [emphasis in original]" (2011, 767). Indeed the public sphere is replete with references to supposed Christian, Judeo-Christian, Western, Asian, Confucian, Muslim, Islamic, Hindu, and African values and identities. Yet what is also becoming apparent is that as social and political actors frame international politics in civilizational terms, these actors are giving rise to new institutional arrangements and practices structured around civilizational categories, while also empowering those very same people or organizations that claim to speak in the name of civilizations. In the process a positive feedback-loop is generated – between civilizational narratives, the (re)orientation of institutional arrangements and practices around civilizational constructs, and processes of recognition bestowed on actors claiming a civilizational identity and voice – that contributes to socially and materially construct civilizations in a cultural-religious sense as meaningful and real entities in world politics.

Take for instance American foreign policy. How the United States can best confront, engage, reach out to, or transform the "Muslim world" all became, after 9/11, major preoccupations for the Bush and Obama administrations. Indeed, the "Muslim world" has become an unproblematic civilizational category not only in American foreign policy discourses, but also in its practices and institutions. Highly symbolic speeches have been delivered reaching out to "Muslims", such as Obama's well-known 2009 Cairo address. Countless educational, inter-faith, economic, and democracy-promotion initiatives have been targeted towards a hugely diverse group of people and countries across multiple continents because they are thought to belong to a common "Muslim world". As of 2012, the United States has two 'ambassadors' to "Islam": a Special Envoy to the Organization of Islamic Conference/Cooperation (OIC) and a Special Representative to Muslim Communities.

One can think of other glaring examples. For instance the United Nations has long been an organization concerned primarily with ensuring peace among *nations* and protecting *individual* human rights. Yet, ever since the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) initiative was institutionalized in 2005, the UN has become involved with promoting mutual understanding among *civilizations*. Civilizational-based international institutions, such as the OIC, which claims to be "the collective voice of the Muslim world" whose scope is to "galvanize the *Ummah* into a unified body",[1] are acquiring greater visibility. The OIC has been at the forefront in promoting "the dialogue of civilizations" as well as other norms such as "defamation of religion", seen as a way to curb perceived worldwide criticism of Islam.

Whether civilizations really exist or not is beyond the point here. What is of interest is that civilizations are increasingly becoming an organizing principle for a growing range of discourses, practices and institutions of international society. In other words, there appears to be a lot of 'civilizational constructions' taking place in international relations. IR scholars have seemed by and large unable, or uninterested, in making much sense of these developments.

A promising avenue does however appear to be emerging. Indeed, although still marginal, a growing attention and interest in civilizational analysis is noticeably gaining ground in IR. This literature is slowly overcoming a widespread skepticism towards civilizational analysis in the discipline, driven thus far by an overwhelming repudiation of Samuel Huntington's "clash of civilizations" thesis. As civilizational analysis expands, a close scrutiny of this literature reveals however that a theoretical and empirical focus on processes of civilizational constructions in international relations practices and institutions has only lately been pursued.

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[1] See: http://www.oic-oci.org/page_detail.asp?p_id=52

It is possible to divide the way in which the civilizational turn in IR has progressed and can further mature, along four main lines of research: 'civilizational dynamics'; 'inter-civilizational ethics'; 'deconstructing civilization/s'; and 'civilizational constructions'.

A line of research based on theorizing and investigating 'civilizational dynamics' sees the scholar engaged in defining and conceptualizing what civilizations, in their 'plural' meaning,[2] are and do. The scholar's concern is to make sense of the different civilizations' in world politics, of their internal characteristics, and their modes of interaction. Some have tended to see civilizations as clearly defined clashing monoliths (Huntington 1993, 1996), others as complex and internally differentiated complexes, marked by a variety of modes of interactions with each other (Cox 2000; Katzenstein 2010b). A line of research on 'inter-civilizational ethics', also takes the existence of civilizations and the plurality of cultures in world politics as a given. What distinguishes it, however, is its ethical impulse towards devising appropriate normative and institutional frameworks for promoting international peace through inter-civilizational dialogue and understanding (Michel and Petito 2009; Petito 2011).

Research on 'deconstructing civilization/s' focuses instead on investigating how discourses about civilizations in the 'plural' – at times overlapping with those of civilization in the 'singular' – are deployed to draw boundaries, de-humanize the "other", legitimize repressive and colonial practices, and sustain unequal power relations. The focus is on deconstructing why, and in whose interest, are civilizational boundaries drawn. Civilizations are generally perceived as having no ontological reality aside from the inclusionary/exclusionary practices that their invocations help to legitimize and promote (Hall and Jackson 2007a).

Most progress and disputes in the emerging civilizational turn have occurred within and among these three lines of research. IR scholarship on civilizations has thus far developed around two main axes of disagreement. The first important debate occurs between those who do believe that civilizations are important units of analysis, but then disagree on what characteristics and shapes civilizations have, and how they do/should interact with each other. These vibrant discussions occur among scholars in and across the 'civilizational dynamics' and 'inter-civilizational ethics' lines of research. The second major point of contention revolves around whether civilizations really exist or not. This line of enquiry often pits scholars in the 'deconstructing civilization/s' tradition against those interested in 'civilizational dynamics' and 'inter-civilizational ethics'. The former generally warn the latter of the dangers of reifying within social reality, through their analytical and theoretical lenses, civilizational identities and categories either in clash or in dialogue (Said 2001). The latter have criticized the former for suffering from an implicit secular Westphalian bias that tends to reify state-centrism (Petito 2011).

The literature and debates on civilizations in IR seems to have reached an impasse, with advocates on each side paying little attention to how civilizational-based thinking is contributing to reorienting social action, and international institutions and practices. I argue that a more explicit focus on what I call a 'civilizational constructions' line of research can theoretically and empirically move forward the nascent civilizational turn in IR in constructive and innovative ways. The paper seeks to rectify this neglect by teasing out and advancing a more self-conscious line of research on

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[2] Civilization/s is a notoriously problematic and ambiguous concept. Broadly speaking one can research and think of civilizations in the 'plural', "invoked when we discuss the criteria for distinguishing and comparing civilizations" (Arnason 2009, 2), or of civilization in the 'singular', used "when we speak of the origins, achievements or prospects of civilization" (Arnason 2009, 2). In the former case civilizations are understood as distinct macro-cultural, macro-social, and/or macro-historical units, which may rise and fall and interact in multiple ways, across time and space (for classical examples in social theory and history see: Braudel 1994; Eisenstadt 2003). In the latter case civilization is thought of as progress, as a certain standard of attainment that distinguishes the economically, politically, socially or scientifically "civilized" from the "un-civilized". The scholar becomes engaged in unpacking either the sources and effects of civilizing processes (in social theory see: Elias 1994; for an IR perspective see: Linklater 2010) or of civilizational thinking, norms and discourses (for perspectives close to IR see: Gong 1984; Bowden 2009). Even if we may refer to the two concepts of civilization, in the plural and in the singular, as differing, if not even as opposite, they are not necessarily mutually exclusive. This paper, and more broadly a line of research on 'civilizational constructions', is mainly concerned with civilizations understood in their plural meaning. Yet in other lines of research – namely 'the politics of civilizations' – the meanings of civilization/s in the 'plural' and 'singular' does at times overlap.

'civilizational constructions'. This has a number of theoretical and empirical payoffs. First it pragmatically sidesteps the seemingly endless and irreconcilable debates about the putative existence and character of civilizations. This is not to say that theorizing about whether civilizations exist, and if so in which form and how they interact, is a futile project. Indeed, as I discuss later, a 'civilizational constructions' approach in many respects builds on the various insights that the other research programs and their disputes have generated on these issues. This said, there is also a need to move beyond the current conversation that has the potential of stalling in an irresolvable turf war, mirroring wider theoretical inter-paradigmatic disputes in IR.

Second, a 'civilizational constructions' lens, rather than concentrating on broad abstractions, focuses instead the scholar's attention on understanding and explaining important empirical phenomena occurring in front of our very own eyes today. It also moves beyond deconstructing discourses. Indeed, as Fred Halliday perceptively pointed out about the 'clash of civilizations' thesis, "Despite the fact that such myths can be revealed as false, once generated and expressed they can acquire a considerable life of their own" (2002, 7; see also: Bottici and Challand 2010). The same can be said about the existence of civilizations more broadly. Hence a 'civilizational constructions' framework recognizes this reality of social life, and takes civilizational thinking, along 'plural' macro-cultural formations, on its own merit. It then investigates how this thinking can become embedded in existing or new practices and institutions of international society. Throughout, actors claiming to act or speak in the name of civilizations become ever more empowered to do so. The salient issue is no longer solely whether civilizations matter or not, or on who draws and re-draws what boundaries for which purpose, but on how civilizations *come to exist*, becoming social facts generating their own dynamics with observable consequences in international society.

The paper is divided into four parts. The first part surveys current civilizational scholarship in IR, dividing it into four different lines of research. It argues that one of the most neglected, yet also most highly promising, lines of research is that on 'civilizational constructions'. It then articulates the key conceptual insights of this approach to civilizational analysis. 'Civilizational constructions' research can be structured around two key moments. First, identifying and unpacking the multiple ways social actors – individuals, non-state organizations, and/or states – come to understand and interpret international politics along civilizational lines. Second, tracing the causal impact that these different modes of civilizational thinking have on existing international practices and institutions.

These two key steps are reflected in the second and third parts of the paper, where the value of a more self-conscious 'civilizational constructions' approach is outlined in a case study of American foreign policy. The second part investigates how American intellectual, policy, and political elites, with great influence on the foreign policymaking process, progressively came to see "Islam" and the "Muslim world" as a strategic civilizational frame of reference in international politics from the 1990s onwards. The section develops a two-by-two matrix that teases out four different combinations of civilizational-based thinking taking place in Washington. These are divided between those who see "U.S.-Islam" relations typified either by *clash* and *confrontation* or by *dialogue* and *engagement*; and between perspectives that see "Islam" and the "Muslim world" along either *essentialist* or *non-essentialist* lines.

The third section, traces how these four different modes of civilizational thinking among American elites filtered through the Bush and Obama administrations' foreign policies following 9/11. In particular the section explores how *clashing/confronting*, during the Bush administration, and *dialoguing/engaging*, during the first Obama administration, with the "Muslim world" became part and parcel of what American foreign policymakers thought about and acted upon. The section then unpacks how the "Muslim world"[3] became embedded in, and materially constructed by, new American foreign policy practices and institutions. The fourth section concludes by teasing out the payoffs of a line of research on 'civilizational constructions' in IR.

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[3] Considerable generalization is involved in using the terms like "Islam", "Muslims", and "Muslim world" hence the use of quotation marks at this point. The paper will trace the emergence and persistence of these terms in American foreign policy discourses and as such quotations marks will be omitted in what follows.

Civilizational Analysis in IR: Towards 'Civilizational Constructions' Research

Thinking along civilizational lines entered the field of IR most prominently two decades ago when Huntington (1993) first articulated his controversial "clash of civilizations" thesis from the pages of *Foreign Affairs*. The concept of civilizations as a meaningful category in international politics, let alone the idea that these supposedly coherent entities were destined to violently clash, has since then been subject to a barrage of theoretical[4] and empirical[5] critique within and outside of IR. Huntington's thesis, then re-iterated in a book (Huntington 1996), was refused as too simplistic at best, if not pernicious at worst. The very case for civilizational analysis in IR was rejected altogether as inherently flawed or dangerous and no respectable scholar wanted to appear to endorse it.[6]

Regardless of what IR scholars tended to conclude, civilizational talk – especially in the wake of 9/11 – continued to resonate widely in public discourses and policy circles around the world.[7] As such, a new wave of scholarship has slowly emerged, willing to engage in a more direct way with civilizational analysis in IR than had been the case before. This literature, like the earlier grouping, does critique Huntington's conception of civilizations for being either too conflict-prone, too static, too fixed, too closed, too monolithic, and/or too essentialist. But rather than throwing the civilizational baby out with the Huntingtonian bath water, IR scholars have increasingly taken seriously the concept of civilizations, both as an object of study and an analytical category in international politics. As Martin Hall argues,

> Civilizational analysis is important not least because the concept of civilization is being used. It seems, at this historical juncture, that the notion of civilization is a significant carrier of knowledge and of thereby attendant preferences and policies (2007, 199).

Overall we can see civilizational analysis developing in IR along four broad lines of research: i) 'civilizational dynamics'; ii) 'inter-civilizational ethics'; iii) 'civilizational constructions'; and iv) 'deconstructing civilization/s'. These approaches contain a plurality of voices that often can, and do, profoundly disagree. These are also not sealed projects with scholars interacting and debating across lines of research. Yet, even if these four research agendas are not necessarily mutually exclusive, and they can and do overlap at times, they do flow from different research logics and questions.

These lines of research can be organized on a two-by-two matrix. On the horizontal axis research programs can be divided between those who treat civilizations as a foundation of international politics and those who take international politics as the foundation of civilizations. In other words, the divide is between those approaches that take civilizations, largely understood here in their 'plural' sense, as the primary unit of analysis or as a derivative of other factors and processes.

The first two lines of research (i and ii) take civilizations as ontological realities in the social world that impact international politics in multiple and complex ways. The last two approaches (iii and iv) are instead rather agnostic, if not even downright skeptical, about the existence of civilizations. What they are more concerned with is to explore how social actors – individuals, non-state organizations, states or international institutions – contribute to produce and reproduce civilizations as meaningful categories in world politics. In many respects this division mirrors Patrick Thaddeus Jackson's influential distinction between "attribute" and "process" ontologies (2010; see also: Jackson

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[4] From a realist perspective see: Walt (1997). From a liberal perspective see: Ikenberry (1997). From a Marxian perspective in IR see: Halliday (2002). From a post-colonial perspective see: Said (2001). For a broader philosophical critique of Huntington's arguments and against the essentialization of individuals around unique and singular identities see: Sen (2006).

[5] For a wide range of studies arguing that Huntington's thesis of civilizational/cultural clashes has very little, or no, empirical evidence see: Chiozza (2002); Fox (2002); Henderson and Tucker (2002).

[6] For an important exception see: Puchala (1997).

[7] The persistence of civilizational talk and thinking in the US and around the world was evident as recently as the tenth anniversary of 9/11, when *Foreign Affairs* was offering free copies of *The Clash Of Civilizations? The Debate* (Hoge 2010) to all its new subscribers.

1999) and Peter Katzenstein's (2010b) distinction between "dispositional" and "discursive" modes of analysis when thinking about civilizations.

While both Jackson and Katzenstein divide civilizational thinking along further categories, which I will touch upon later, they do not distinguish between scholarship that is largely analytical and scholarship with an inbuilt normative commitment. This is an important distinction, particularly when touching upon sensitive and controversial subjects like civilizations, hence one worth recognizing. As such I further distinguish between lines of research – see vertical axis on the matrix – that are guided by an analytical approach to theory (i and iii) and those that have a normative/critical-emancipatory orientation (ii and iv).

Table 1: Civilizational Analysis in IR: Lines of Research

	Primacy Accorded to Civilizations	*Primacy Accorded to Politics*
Analytical	Civilizational Dynamics	Civilizational constructions
Normative / Critical-Emancipatory	Inter-Civilizational Ethics	Deconstructing Civilizations

Research based on theorizing and investigating 'civilizational dynamics' tends to be underpinned by the idea that there are, across time and space, a plurality of civilizations in the social world – broadly understood as different macro-formations and entities organized around distinctive cultural, political and/or economic systems. Based on this premise the scholar becomes engaged in defining and conceptualizing what civilizations are and do, what he/she understands to be the internal characteristics and possibly external interactions of civilizations. An investigation into the multiple ways in which civilizations, as units of analysis, have a bearing across time and space on world politics generally follows.

This type of research has dominated civilizational analysis in IR. It is most evident in the work of scholars who have theorized civilizations along 'essentialist' lines, such as Huntington and others (Gress 1998). A 'civilizational dynamics' line of research is equally evident in recent critiques of Huntington among sociologically oriented IR scholars. These scholars treat civilizations as units of analysis, but conceptualize them in 'non-essentialist'[8] terms. Unlike Huntington's clearly defined, homogeneous, primordial cultural civilizational monoliths, sociologically informed scholars emphasize the heterogeneous, overlapping, contested, changing, and historically contingent nature of civilizations.

In recent years, Peter Katzenstein has been among the clearest proponents of a non-essentialist view of civilizations, most explicitly outlined in his edited trilogy on civilizations (2010a, 2012a, 2012b). Katzenstein – who draws from the work of social theorists such as Shmuel Eisenstadt, Randall Collins, and Norbert Elias – advances a 'pluralist' understanding of civilizations, defined as "loosely coupled, internally differentiated, elite-centered social systems that are integrated into a global context" (2010b, 5). Civilizations may be thought of as "configurations, constellations, or complexes. They are not fixed in space or time. They are both internally highly differentiated and culturally loosely integrated" (2010b, 5). These "civilizational configurations are most similar not in their cultural coherence and tendency toward clash", Katzenstein argues, "but in their pluralist differences and in their intercivilizational encounters and transcivilizational engagements" (2010b, 7). The scope of Katzenstein's trilogy is to explore the conditions that give rise to clashes, encounters, or engagements among a plurality of internally differentiated civilizational complexes such as Anglo-America, Europe, China, Japan, India, Islam, and the overarching Civilization of Modernity.

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[8] Whereas essentialist approaches largely see civilizations as bounded, coherent, integrated, centralized, consensual, and static; non-essentialist ones treat civilizations as weakly bounded, contradictory, loosely integrated, heterarchical, contested, and in constant state of flux (Hall and Jackson 2007b, 7).

Similarly to Katzenstein, a growing range of constructivist (Adler 2010), neo-Gramscian (Cox 2000; Cox and Schechter 2002), and historical sociological scholars (Hobson 2004, 2007) have been concerned with teasing out, along non-essentialist lines, civilizations' characteristics and influence in world politics. Overall, both in their essentialist and non-essentialist forms, Civilizations are rarely seen as political entities in and of themselves. Instead they are conceptualized as containing various types of political actors, be they non-state actors, states, empires or polities (Huntington 1996, p.44; Katzenstein 2010, p.24). Civilizations generally appear either as cultural structures or social, political, economic processes, which constitute actors' identities and interests, constraining or enabling their actions in world politics.

'Inter-civilizational ethics' scholarship starts from similar premises regarding the ontological reality of civilizations in the social world. This scholarship is, however, principally driven by a normative commitment towards avoiding civilizational clashes and confrontations, rather than establishing precisely what civilizations are and do. Scholars in this line of research take religious and cultural pluralism seriously in international society and are mostly concerned with devising the intellectual, normative and institutional frameworks to promote international peace through inter-civilizational dialogue and understanding. The key to avoiding civilizational clashes, scholars like Fabio Petito (2011) argue, cannot be simply reduced to 'theorizing civilizations away' as some have attempted to do (i.e. Amartya Sen and Edward Said). But rather to recognize that in a post-Cold War world marked by the reassertion of civilizations – defined in a culturalist-religious sense as strategic frames of reference – a dialogue among 'strong' civilizational identities and traditions is an essential condition for bringing about a more peaceful world (see also: Michel and Petito 2009).[9]

Moving to the right column of Table 1, we find the two lines of research that give primacy to politics over civilizations. The concern here is less with defining what civilizations are and do, and more with what non-state and state actors think and claim civilizations are and do. Much of this type of research is rather agnostic, if not even skeptical, about whether civilizations matter at all. The focus is instead on how individual or collective actors make sense of their surroundings in civilizational terms and on the causal "power that [civilizational] claims exercise in social and political practice" (Hall and Jackson 2007b, 4). The analysis largely focuses on the study of "what the invocation of civilizational identities *does* in world politics [emphasis in original]" (O'Hagan 2007, 16).

Research on 'civilizational constructions' and 'deconstructing civilization/s' is divided chiefly on what they understand civilizational-based thinking and discourses as *doing* in international relations. The former, rooted in an analytical approach to theory, is concerned with exploring how and when civilizational-based thinking contributes to crystallizing civilizations in international politics by changing and transforming the practices and institutions of international society along civilizational lines. The latter, rooted in a normative/critical-emancipatory approach to theory, unpacks how civilizational claims – particularly framed in essentialist terms – conceal, sustain, or legitimize exclusionary, violent, or oppressive practices in world politics.

Of the two lines of research, 'deconstructing civilization/s' is the one that has received the most attention so far. One of the clearest expressions of this approach can be found in the edited volume by Patrick Thaddeus Jackson and Martin Hall, which focuses on the "necessarily power-laden" processes through which civilizational "boundaries are continually produced and reproduced" (Hall and Jackson 2007b, 6). Rather than rejecting civilizational analysis from the start, these scholars take public invocations of civilization/s seriously. The focus then turns towards deconstructing how, and in whose interest, are civilizational boundaries drawn, and revealing who is included/excluded and why. Oftentimes this type of research blends understandings of civilization in the 'singular' with civilizations in the 'plural', unpacking how the boundaries drawn between the 'West' and 'non-West', overlap with those between the 'civilized' and the 'un-civilized', producing discourses glorifying a 'civilized West' against an 'un-civilized non-West'.

In his book *Civilizing the Enemy*, for instance, Jackson (2006) provides a case study of how public rhetoric after World War II was deployed to draw and redraw the boundaries of what "Western

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[9] For similar perspectives with wide resonance among IR scholars see the work of political theorists such as Fred Dallmayr (2002) and area/Islamic studies specialists such as Bassam Tibi (2012).

civilization" consisted in, delegitimizing all policy options other than West Germany's incorporation into America's sphere of influence. The events of 9/11 and the ensuing War on Terror against the "barbaric" terrorist and Islamist "other" have provided fertile ground for this kind of analysis (Mullin 2013; Pasha 2007; Salter 2002, 2007). Brett Bowden (2009) exposes how the notion of "civilization" as a stage-managed account of history has been used to legitimize imperialism, uniformity, and conformity to Western standards, not only in the War on Terror, but as far back as the Crusades and the colonial era. By deconstructing the concept of "civilization", he seeks to demonstrate that "the West" and "the Rest" have more commonalities than differences, and hence that a genuine intercivilizational dialogue is possible. Bowden's work interestingly straddles the two normative/critical-emancipatory civilizational analysis lines of research.

Finally, 'civilizational constructions' is an approach that has only marginally appeared on the horizon of the civilizational turn in IR. This line of research, compared to that on 'deconstructing civilization/s', focuses less on *deconstructing* civilizational discourses and more on investigating how civilizational thinking socially and materially *constructs* civilizations in world politics, by embedding them in new international practices and institutions. In other words, while research on 'deconstructing civilization/s' is concerned with uncovering the politics behind civilizational thinking, 'civilizational constructions' research instead explores how civilizational thinking affects politics (broadly understood).

In many respects, a 'civilizational constructions' agenda builds upon and moves forward what Peter Katzenstein has called the "primordiality" approach to civilizations (2010b, 12-13). For Katzenstein "primordiality" offers a *via media* between "dispositional" approaches to civilizations (i.e. taking civilizations as concrete units of analysis) and "discursive" ones (i.e. understanding civilizations mostly in terms of power-laden discourses). In Katzenstein's words,

> Civilizations come to exist in the conventional understanding of that term as "being believed to exist," as tightly or loosely coupled, and taken-for-granted or highly contested cultural complexes. Being named is an important aspect of the existence of civilizations, not just mere rhetoric or cheap talk (2010b, 13).

This 'believing' and 'naming' of civilizations into existence occurs for Katzenstein mainly when civilizations are thought of in essentialist/primordialist terms and as closed clashing entities – as was the case with Huntington's books and papers which were widely translated across the world, reaching thousands of people (Katzenstein 2010b, 13). Yet, why not extend the ability to construct civilizations also to those who see them in non-essentialist ways? As well as to those who think about civilizations as likely to enter into dialogue and engage with each other rather than clashing?

For example, Turan Kayaoglu (2012) has shown how Islamic activists – starting with the former Iranian President Muhammad Khatami, followed by faith-based movements such as the Gülen movement and by international organizations such as the OIC have promoted since the 1990s a series of initiatives and institutions known as the "dialogue of civilizations". Kayaoglu then traces how the "dialogue of civilizations" agenda has become a significant part of contemporary Muslim thought and practice of world politics, leading to institutional changes within international organizations, spurring various Islamic attempts to theologically accommodate other religions, and instigating grassroots Islamic mobilization for interfaith dialogue. Although Kayaoglu does not frame his research explicitly within a civilizational analysis paradigm, it surely does speak to those interested in investigating how civilizational thinking becomes embedded in existing or new practices and institutions of world politics.

A 'civilizational constructions' perspective thus could take Katzenstein's middle of the road "primordiality" approach as a starting point, and then open it up to multiple types of civilizational constructions. Broadly speaking, a 'civilizational constructions' line of research would be arranged around two theoretical insights. It first recognizes that civilizations can be thought of and discursively articulated into existence by a wide variety of individual and collective actors and in multiple and conflicting ways. Above all, civilizations can be understood as essentialized or non-essentialized entities, and as clashing or as able to peacefully dialogue and engage with one another. Second, it calls for an exploration into how, by framing social reality in civilizational terms, actors causally give

origin to new international practices and institutional structures that, also by empowering those speaking in the name of civilizations, construct civilizations as meaningful categories in international society.

These theoretical insights are applied to a case study of American foreign policy in order to explore the promise of a more self-conscious 'civilizational constructions' research program. In particular, the case study will unpack how different combinations of civilizational thinking about the Muslim world and Islam influenced and transformed American foreign policy practices and institutions in the aftermath of 9/11.

American Elites and Civilizational–Based Thinking about the Muslim World

Following the end of the Cold War, American foreign policy became ever more entangled, from the 1990s onwards, in the Middle East and North African region. Concomitantly local social and political dynamics brought to the fore of domestic and regional politics both peaceful and violent movements claiming to be inspired by Islam. As different forms of domestic and transnational Islamist movements increasingly became central to American strategic concerns, so too debates about the nature of religiously-based civilizational categories such as Islam, Muslims and the Muslim world started to emerge in policy, research and scholarly debates in Washington D.C. The terrorist attacks of 9/11 carried out by Al-Qaeda in the name of a global *jihad* against "Zionists and Crusaders" brought discussions about Islam and Muslims from the margins to the center of American strategic thinking.

A great deal of civilizational narratives about the Muslim world among American intellectual and political elites has taken place over the past two decades. These narratives can be divided into a two-by-two matrix (see Table 2). The first division is between those who view America's relations with "Islam" and the "Muslim world" through a *clash/confrontation* perspective or a *dialogue/engagement* one (horizontal axis). The second division is between those who see Islam and the Muslim world as a civilizational complex through *essentialist* or *non-essentialist* lenses (vertical axis). The matrix reveals four different ways of thinking about Islam as a civilizational complex across the American foreign policy establishment. The four civilizational perspectives are ideal types. They do not capture in their entirety all the debates and factions in Washington that have pushed and pulled for policies towards Islamist groups in particular, and the Muslim world in general, over the past twenty years.

Table 2: Civilizational-Based Thinking: American Elites and the Muslim World

	Clash / Confrontation	*Dialogue / Engagement*
Essentialists	Bad Islam-Good West	Good Islam-Bad Terrorists
Non-Essentialists	Bad Muslims-Good Muslims	Good Islamists-Bad Islamists

Starting from the left column we find those who view "American-Muslim world" relations as marked either by a *clash* of civilizations or a more specific and circumscribed *confrontation* between America and "bad Muslims" within a civilization. The "Bad Islam-Good West" perspective (top left essentialist corner of the matrix), has been most explicitly articulated by prominent political science and area studies scholars, such as Samuel Huntington and Bernard Lewis. Their writings, appearing in popular journals such as *Foreign Affairs* and *The Atlantic,* have had a great influence on public debates about Islam in Washington.

This perspective tends to see Islam as a monolith religion and coherent culture where something has gone awfully wrong. Islam and Muslims stand in stark contrast to the West, seen as the standard of enlightened modernity and democracy. Little effort is made to sharply distinguish Islamism as political ideology from Islam. The former is seen as a natural outgrowth of the latter's character, or its inability, compared to Christianity and the West, to reform in the face of modernity. The natural conclusion of this reasoning is to foresee a post-Cold War world in which secular ideological struggles have been replaced by a clash of civilizations between the secularized "Judeo-Christian West" and the "Islamic world" (Lewis 1990, 2002; Huntington 1993, 1996). Huntington articulates clearly this point as follows,

> The underlying problem for the West is not Islamic fundamentalism. It is Islam, a different civilization whose people are convinced of the superiority of their culture and are obsessed with the inferiority of their power. The problem for Islam is not the CIA or the U.S. Department of Defense. It is the West, a different civilization whose people are convinced of the universality of their culture. (1996, 217-218)

The "Bad Muslims-Good Muslims"[10] outlook (bottom left non-essentialist corner) captures two different groups of actors with an important influence over policy debates in Washington. First, this perspective is most explicitly articulated by a number of pundits, columnists, think tank and research institutes closely associated with the neoconservative movement. It is a non-essentialist perspective, because those holding such a view do not treat Islam or the Muslim world as a monolith or as an uncontested category with a clear essence. Rather, Islam is seen as an entity marked by internal contestation and differentiation, split in two camps along the lines of violent anti-Western and peaceful pro-Western Muslims. Here, Muslims are perceived as locked into an ideological battle, a "war of ideas" pitting 'good moderate Muslims' against 'bad fundamentalist' ones, for the future direction of Islam as a religion and civilization.

The "good Muslims" are secular Muslims or pro-Western governments (Mubarak's Egypt, Saudi Arabia, etc.). The "bad Muslims" are instead Islamists of all strides, from globalized terrorist networks (Al Qaeda), to domestic movements (such as the Muslim Brotherhood, Hezbollah, Hamas) or anti-Western states (such as Iran). These different actors become monolithically described as "Islamic fundamentalism", "Islamofascism", "militant Islam". "Bad Muslims" are conceived to be a security threat because of their perceived hostility to American values (democracy and freedom) as well as to its interests in the Middle East and beyond (cheap oil, Israel's security, avoiding nuclear proliferation). This global deterritorialized force within Islam, but not Islam itself as a religion, is considered an evil on a par with previous totalitarian enemies such as Communism and Nazism. The neoconservative narrative of a 'clash within a civilization' is produced and reproduced by writers and pundits closely associated with the American Enterprise Institute (AEI) (Frum and Perle 2003; Muravchik and Szrom 2008; Podhoretz 2007), reports from research institutes such as RAND (2004, 2007), Daniel Pipes (2002) and his Middle East Forum, and the Hudson Institute's *Trends in Islamist Ideology* series.[11]

A second source reproducing the idea of a Muslim entity in international politics, one marked by considerable internal differences but nevertheless overwhelmingly antagonistic to America and the West, are the multiple PEW polls that have come to track, and reify, "Muslims' opinions". These polls have consistently reported on America's dismal image among "Muslims" and the persistence of "Muslim-Western tensions" ever since 9/11 (PEW 2006, 2011; see also: Wike 2012). Such polls portray the Muslim world as a coherent anti-Western space, but not a monolithic one as the polls do recognize national differences in attitudes towards America across different "Muslim countries".

On the *dialogue / engagement* right side of the matrix, are those who do not see "American-Islam" relations as inherently problematic and are mostly concerned with challenging the *clash / confrontation* narrative. The "Good Islam-Bad Terrorists" perspective (top right essentialist corner) portrays terrorists and violent Islamist groups as an exception, a loud minority of fanatic extremists. These groups have hijacked and distorted Islam and have instrumentally used its language (such as: *jihad*, *umma*, *kafir*, etc.) for their radical political purposes. Terrorists are largely the product of political and socioeconomic forces, not culture or religion. It is a civilizational perspective, however, because those holding it do not simply distinguish between terrorists and civilians, but feel compelled to bring Islam into the mix and make the case that there is little or no link between terrorism and Islam.

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[10] I draw here from Mahmood Mamdani's (2002) critique of the Bush administration's rhetorical distinction between bad and good Muslims.

[11] For a good overview of neoconservative thought on Islam and political Islam see: Lynch (2008).

Indeed, they argue that "genuine Islam" is a peaceful religion and "real Muslims" are peaceful people, perfectly compatible with modernity, democracy and American values (Esposito and Voll 1996; Ahmed 2010). Rather than essentializing Islam as inherently violent, the religion and its – more or less – faithful adherents are essentialized instead as innately peaceful. Against notions of clashes, those upholding such an outlook propose one of interfaith and/or intercultural dialogue in order to dissipate misunderstandings among Americans and Muslims, and undercut terrorist narratives. Those holding such a perspective seek to develop a broad-based relationship with over one billion members of the world's population who, while understood to be extremely diverse, are perceived also to share a common religious and cultural bond, and possibly a growing belief that America is at war with them. It is an outlook that finds expression in the work of various scholars and activists with an important influence in Washington's policy circles.

First, there are activists who, from a religious perspective, advocate for inter-faith dialogues, such as imam Feisal Abdul Rauf, leader of the park-51 initiative in New York, or Eboo Patel, an inter-faith youth activist. Second, there are scholars and pundits who call, from a secular perspective, for greater inter-civilizational engagement and better understanding of the Muslim world. In this category fall those like Akbar Ahmed (2003, 2007; see also: Forst and Ahmed 2005), former Pakistani ambassador to the UK and professor of Islamic studies at the American University; as well as initiatives such as the Brookings Institute's sponsored US-Islamic World Forum, Georgetown University's Talal Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding directed by John Esposito and John Voll, and the Leadership Group on US-Muslim Engagement, led among others by Madeleine Albright (US-Muslim Engagement Project 2009). Third, there is the work by polling institutes such as Gallup, which prefer to emphasize how Americans and Muslims as more alike than opposite. Under the direction of Dalia Mogadeh and John Esposito, a major survey was conducted, showing that what a 'billion Muslims really thought' about a variety of international issues, was not that dissimilar to the responses given by Americans to similar questions (Esposito and Mogahed 2007).

The "Bad Islamist-Good Islamist" outlook (bottom right non-essentialist corner) unpacks more thoroughly the phenomenon of political Islam and how this relates in multifaceted and not always straightforward ways to violence and terrorism. Islamist movements are distinguished between those that may have legitimate grievances, pursued through peaceful and democratic means, and other more extremist and violent groups. Islam is perceived neither as a monolith, nor as a civilizational entity that can be easily split into two opposing internal camps of "good" or "bad" Muslims, but as a major world religion which is open to multiple and contradictory political interpretations. Essentializations of Islamism and Islam as either inherently violent or peaceful are forsaken in favor of viewing them as complex, fragmented, context and country specific forces, with which America can and should engage, rather than dismiss as outrightly hostile and confrontational.

This is a civilizational perspective because the Muslim world delineates the human and geographic area where this complexity is explored, and towards which American foreign policy should be targeted. This view, for example, was first and most clearly articulated among policymakers by Edward Djerejian (1992), former ambassador to Israel and assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern affairs. It is also a perspective which marks the work of leading scholars on Islamism and Islam with important ties to foreign policy circles, such as John Esposito (Esposito 1991, 1999, 2010) and Peter Mandaville (Mandaville 2001, 2005, 2007).

Overall policy debates in America on the characteristics and threat, or lack thereof, of Islam have tended to take place between the four civilizational perspectives here identified. While there are important differences between them, what is salient is that they all treat the religio-culturally defined Muslim world as a civilizational strategic frame of reference of paramount importance to American security and world politics. These four perspectives are important because they provided the intellectual context within which successive American administrations, from Bush Jr.'s to Obama's, structured American foreign policy in the aftermath of 9/11. They provided different and competing explanations about the nature and possible threat of Islamist movements and Islam to America in the post-Cold War world. The following section explores how presidents and their administrations have, in one way or another, subscribed to these civilizational perspectives – often relying upon the very same individuals and organizations articulating them.

America's Civilizational Foreign Policy From Bush to Obama

Winning the "War of Ideas" in the Aftermath of 9/11

President G.W. Bush's first reaction to 9/11 was to adopt a "Bad terrorist-Good Islam" outlook. In an effort to downplay the notion that a hypothetical clash of civilizations had turned from distant nightmare into present day reality, the president quickly visited a mosque in Washington D.C. Here Bush pronounced a theologically charged speech on the nature of Islam as a faith and its compatibility with American values, "These acts of violence against innocents violate the fundamental tenets of the Islamic faith […] The face of terror is not the true faith of Islam […] Islam is peace" (2001).

While Bush continued to perform similar conciliatory rhetorical and symbolic gestures towards Islam,[12] these were muted by the logics of the War on Terror that soon took over. The administration's views on the role of Islam in the attacks overwhelmingly shifted away from Bush's initial praise of "Islam" and condemnation of "terrorists". Key figures in the administration, such as Vice President Dick Cheney and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, came to hold a "good West-bad Islam" outlook which was deeply shaped and influenced by scholars like Bernard Lewis (Observer.com 2006; see also: Cheney 2006).

Neoconservatives were another key constituency informing the administration's view of Islam. Pundits and policymakers generally associated with the neoconservative movement, such as Elliot Abrams, Douglas Feith, Zalmay Khalilzad, Lewis "Scooter" Libby, Richard Perle, and Paul Wolfowitz, held important government positions at the time. These obtained a growing sway and policy influence within the administration in the aftermath of 9/11 (Mann 2004; Fukuyama 2004). Their views of Islam were in the confrontationist camp, but, as argued earlier, largely espoused a somewhat more nuanced "Bad Muslims-Good Muslims" outlook.

The 2002 National Security Strategy (NSS) soon revealed that the administration's view of the security threat posed by Al-Qaeda, and Islamism more generally, had crystallized around the neoconservative civilizational perspective. Terrorism and the war that was going to be conducted against it, the NSS explained, "is not a clash of civilizations. It does, however, reveal the clash inside a civilization, a battle for the future of the Muslim world. This is a struggle of ideas…" (NSS 2002, 31; see also: NSS 2006, 9-11, 36).

Winning the "war of ideas" against "Islamofascism" – a term that permeated even Bush's rhetoric by 2006 (Stolberg 2006) – and influencing the outcome of this internal battle between violent/extremist and peaceful/moderate Muslims in favor of the latter, became a central national security concern for the administration. Winning was to be achieved through two broad types of policy. First, an active military, diplomatic and aid campaign was pursued to reform the Muslim world by promoting liberal values in the so-called "broader Middle East". Second, a wide range of "Muslim-specific initiatives" were implemented (GAO 2006, 11-17). These initiatives largely revolved around a far-reaching public diplomacy and communication strategy, designed to overtly and covertly improve America's image and standing, while also targeting and discrediting Islamist ideology, in the Muslim world.

Democracy promotion as an element of American foreign policy is not a post-9/11 novelty, but has a long, complex and at times controversial history (Ikenberry, Inoguchi, and Cox 2000). Yet, very much under the influence of neoconservative thought, which saw democracy promotion as a potent antidote to Islamism (Dalacoura 2005, 3-6; 2011; Lynch 2008, 201), America's national security in the aftermath of 9/11 became increasingly linked to the democratization of the Muslim demarcated "broader Middle East". Making the case for the war against Saddam to the international community at the UN in 2002, Bush linked Iraq to the ongoing military intervention in Afghanistan and diplomatic efforts to promote elections in the Palestinian territories – which then brought Hamas to victory in 2006. Iraq was described as part and parcel of a broader strategy to inspire democratic

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[12] Such as hosting regular *iftar* dinners at the White House, adding copies of the Koran to the Presidential Library in 2005, or conducting more visits to mosques in 2002 and 2007.

"reforms throughout the Muslim world" (Bush 2002). Afghanistan, Palestine and Iraq, Bush continued, would "show by their example that honest government and respect for women and the great Islamic tradition of learning can triumph in the *Middle East and beyond* [emphasis added]".

Alongside the "hard edge of military-led regime change in Iraq", in 2002 the administration rolled out "a complementary soft side" to its democracy promotion efforts in the Muslim world (Carothers 2003, 403). The centrepiece of these efforts would be the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), which Richard Haas, then Director of Policy Planning at the State Department, described as an attempt to "expand political participation, support civil society, and fortify the rule of law [in] Muslim nations" (2003, 144). By 2009 MEPI had contributed over $530 million to implement more than 600 projects in 17 countries and territories (Spirnak 2009). MEPI was largely designed around long-standing geographical boundaries, rather than Muslim civilizational ones. Democratization support for the Muslim "beyond", as Bush had mentioned in his UN speech, came in 2005, with the launch of the Broader Middle East and North Africa (BMENA) Initiative. The initiative was designed to be a multilateral development and reform plan aimed at "fostering economic and political liberalization in a wide geographic area of Arab and non-Arab Muslim countries" (Sharp 2010, 19-20; see also: Cofman Wittes 2004)

Public diplomacy and strategic communication became a central tool in winning the "war of ideas" against Islamist ideology. Multiple initiatives, some widely publicized and others undercover, were launched following 9/11. These were designed to reach out and improve America's image in the Muslim world and expand the pool of "good Muslims", as well as isolate the "bad Muslims" and undermine Islamists' narratives by influencing theological and political debates among scholars and clerics.

When ramping up its public diplomacy activities, designed to target Islam and Muslims, the Bush administration faced a number of institutional obstacles in coordinating and delivering policies along new civilizational lines. Coordinating America's efforts across bureaucracies, and within them, became high on the agenda. A number of interagency groups were formed, which sought to understand how to undermine the threat posed by Islamic ideology. In 2004 a Muslim World Outreach Policy Coordination Committee (PCC), co-chaired by the National Security Council and the State Department, was created, with a focus on developing a public diplomacy strategy targeted towards marginalizing extremists among Muslims (Johnson, Dale, and Cronin 2005, p.7; GAO 2005; Kaplan 2006).

A comprehensive public diplomacy strategy was then rolled out in 2007. The strategy's core idea was to, "isolate and marginalize violent extremists who threaten the freedom and peace sought by civilized people of every nation, culture and faith" (PCC 2007, p.3). This goal would be achieved, among other goals, by actively engaging "Muslim communities", amplifying "mainstream Muslim voices", isolating and discrediting "terrorist leaders and organizations", "de-legitimizing terror" as a tactic, and demonstrating that the "West is open to all religions and is not in conflict with any faith" (PCC 2007, p.3). The strategy was drafted mainly with the aim to improve the effectiveness, encourage the coordination, and give a direction to an ever-expanding pool of Muslim-focused programs and initiatives launched in the aftermath of 9/11.

Media campaigns, TV, newspapers, and radio broadcasting, were being used to reach out to Muslims, to improve America's image, and to dispel the clash of civilization narrative. The TV station Al-Hurra and Radio Sawa were launched, in 2004 and 2002 respectively, to convey the American message to Arab and Muslim audiences. An ever-expanding range of exchange programs and interfaith activities directed at Muslims – whether youth, students, academics, business people, and religious leaders – became a central component of the administration's outreach efforts (for an excellent overview see: Amr 2009). Karen Hughes, Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy (2005-2007) toured the Muslim world in 2005, from Indonesia, to Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Turkey. She met women and youth representatives, and organized, in places like Turkey, interfaith dialogues among local Christian, Jewish and Muslim communities (Asia Times 2005).

Great efforts were made to tarnish Al-Qaeda's image among Muslims. Reports at the time revealed that the CIA was carrying out covert programs targeting Islamic media, religious leaders, and political parties (Kaplan 2005, 2006). The US increasingly worked through "credible third parties"

(Lynch 2010, 15), in other words through religious leaders and opinion-makers, to expose Al-Qaeda's narrative and delegitimize terror as un-Islamic. During James Glassman's stint as Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy (2008-2009), State Department resources were freely used to back a number of religious groups and "moderate voices engaged in the battle of ideas with extremists about the true nature of Islam" (Waterman 2011). *Madrassas* (religious schools), particularly those that appeared to churn out anti-American Islamist ideology, became a concern. Reports cite programs geared towards reforming *madrassas* curricula in places like Indonesia, Pakistan and Afghanistan (Pease 2009, 8, 15; Pipes 2011).

Overall, the Bush administration spent hundreds of millions of dollars to fund a growing number of programs designed to promote "moderate Islam". A *US News* report calculated that in 2005 the American government was spending around $1.26 billion in public diplomacy to "change the very face of Islam" (Kaplan 2005). A more conservative and detailed breakdown, offered by a Brookings report, estimated that in 2006, the US was spending at least $437 million on public diplomacy initiatives specifically "targeting Arab and Muslim populations" (Amr 2009, 8).

The more that Bush and his administration repeated that the War on Terror was not against "Islam" or "moderate Muslims", but a confrontation against "Islamofascism" and "radical Muslims", the more national security rhetoric and policy reflexively acquired a civilizational dimension. By declaring a war between America, described as the beacon of freedom, and the monolithic and obscurantist forces of "radical Islam", Bush was also unwittingly legitimizing Osama Bin Laden as speaking for Islam, ultimately reproducing the clash of civilization narrative between the West and Islam on which groups like Al Qaeda based much of their ideological appeal (Kepel and Ghazaleh 2008, 16; Gerges 2010).

Scholars and pundits in Washington, when critical of the Bush administration's response to 9/11 – its aggressive and divisive rhetoric and its militarized democratization program – themselves fell back on civilizational talk. The War on Terror and its policy excesses (such as the Iraq war and cases of torture in Guantanamo and Abu Graib) were responsible for the "widespread anti-Americanism among mainstream Muslims and Islamists", scholars like Esposito (2007) pointed out. A classical refrain was to criticize the Bush administration for repeatedly mistaking the good Muslim *forest* for the rotten terrorist *tree*. America, Akbar Ahmed argued, urgently needed to "comprehend Islam, not only for the sake of its ideals (which included religious tolerance) but also for its geopolitical needs and strategy" (2010, 6). Prominent liberal policymakers and scholars were involved in compiling a major report with the suggestive title, "Changing Course: A New Direction for U.S. Relations with the Muslim World" (US-Muslim Engagement Project 2009).

Driven mainly by the failures of Iraq, Bush sidelined the neoconservatives towards the end of his second term. In the process, the president abandoned the "Bad Muslims-Good Muslims" rhetoric that had characterized most of his presidency. He somewhat reverted to his initial instinct of a less confrontational approach to Islam. It is in this context, and in a last effort to re-engage with Muslims, that in 2008 Bush appointed Sada Cumber, a Karachi-born Pakistani American, as the first Special Envoy to the OIC. "The core of his [Sada Cumber's] mission", Bush argued, "is to explain to the Islamic world that America is a friend" (2008).

Obama's "New Beginning" with the Muslim World

With pollsters tracking "Muslim" attitudes towards America, scholars arguing that the US was misunderstanding "Islam", and policymakers calling for a new direction with the "Muslim world", much of the national security debate in Washington critical of the Bush administration was firmly within a civilizational paradigm upon the president's departure. This environment shaped the intellectual context within which Barack Obama came into the presidency. Indeed, when President Obama took office, repairing the "divide between the United States and the Muslim world" was among his administration's most pressing concerns (Amr 2009, 7).

The administration soon devised a strategy aimed at bridging this apparent divide with Muslims. Obama sought to mend fences by: i) making highly symbolic gestures and shifting rhetoric towards a more conciliatory tone (as opposed to the confrontational one adopted by the previous

administration); ii) attempting to address contentious foreign policy issues (as opposed to solely pressing ahead with democracy promotion); and iii) developing a policy framework to engage all Muslims and marginalize radicals (as opposed to structuring discourses and policies around a global "war of ideas" against Islamists).

Much of the administration's strategy towards re-booting relations with Islam paralleled closely many of the recommendations from the "Changing Course" report, drafted by, among others, Madeleine Albright, Dennis Ross and Dalia Mogahed (for a detailed comparison see: Zaharna 2009, 5-8). This is no surprise, given the close ties between policymakers like Madeleine Albright and Dennis Ross and the Democratic leadership. Furthermore, Dalia Mogahed was invited, along with Eboo Patel, to sit on the President's 25-member White House Advisory Council on Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships. President Obama, Secretary of State Clinton and many other members in the administration – at different times – addressed and/or participated in the Brooking's sponsored yearly US-Islamic World Forums in Doha, Qatar.

What is salient here is that the civilizational strategic frame of reference of Islam and the Muslim world carried over from one administration to the next, albeit with some differences. While remaining still within the confines of the civilizational-based thinking outlined in Table 2, the administration shifted diagonally away from the "Bad Muslims- Good Muslims" outlook (bottom left side of the matrix: the non-essentialist, clash/confrontation perspective), towards the "Good Islam-Bad terrorist" perspective (top right side of the matrix: the essentialist dialogue/engagement perspective). A "Good Islam-Bad Terrorist" outlook led the Obama administration to concentrate in terms of discourses and practices on engaging *all* Muslims, while simultaneously focusing more *narrowly* on countering extremists and terrorists.

President Obama's first approach was to shift rhetoric and reach out to "Muslims" through highly symbolic gestures and speeches. These aimed to underscore the common values and interests that bonded the US and Muslims together, while simultaneously deemphasizing the link between Islam and terrorism. The President repeatedly used his oratory qualities and personal story[13] to reach out to Muslim audiences and to address the increasingly sedimented clash of civilization narrative. "To the Muslim world, we seek a new way forward, based on mutual interest and mutual respect", Obama (2009a) remarked in his inaugural address.

Similar overtures were explicitly repeated in an interview given to Arab TV channels (CNN 2009) and in Turkey during one of Obama's first foreign missions (TIME 2009). However the apogee came with the president's June 2009 "a New Beginning" speech in Cairo. In an address peppered with quotes from the Koran, Obama explained to an audience that went far beyond the highly emblematic Al-Azhar University where he spoke, that,

> I've come here to Cairo to seek a new beginning between the United States and Muslims around
> the world, one based on mutual interest and mutual respect, and one based upon the truth that
> America and Islam are not exclusive and need not be in competition (2009b).

The administration went to great lengths to use rhetoric that disassociated Islam from terrorism. References to the charged language of the "War on Terror" against "radical Islam", in general, and the "war of ideas" within "Islam", in particular, were dropped (Burkeman 2009; Waterman 2011). The President's new NSS framed the terrorist threat in terms of "defeating and disrupting violent extremists" (2010, 19-22). Throughout his first term, when major incidents flared up seemingly, reviving the clash of civilizations narrative – whether in the case of the Terry Jones controversies, the accidental disposal of Korans in Afghanistan, and the anti-Muslim YouTube video – Obama, and other administration high-level officials, repeatedly explained how 'America is not at war against Islam, but against terrorist organizations'.

A second approach pursued by Obama towards the Muslim "other" focused less on pushing for democracy through armed intervention[14] and more on addressing contentious political and policy

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[13] During his childhood Obama lived in Indonesia, his Kenyan father was "Muslim".

[14] Obama however continued and expanded most non-military democracy promotion programs launched by Bush, such as

issues, such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, torture and Guantanamo, and the war in Iraq. Various scholars (Esposito 2007) as well as reports (US-Muslim Engagement Project 2009, 6-7), had suggested that these issues, rather than just the lack of democracy, were at the root of greater Muslim mistrust and narrower terrorist activity towards the US.

Obama sought to confront the festering Israeli-Palestinian conflict from the very beginning of his presidency by appointing George Mitchell as Special Envoy to the peace process. Within the first month of his presidency, the newly elected president signed executive orders to shut down Guantanamo and curb any form of harsh interrogation that was tantamount to torture. He also committed to withdrawing America's military operations from the unpopular "war of choice" in Iraq, refocusing on the less controversial "war of necessity" in Afghanistan.[15] While these policy shifts had national security merits in their own right, they did not occur in a vacuum of meaning. They had a more subtle and indirect intent. The urgency with which they were dealt with was, to a great extent, tied to the desire to repair the standing of Americans with Muslims. Indeed Obama would mention these very same issues as important sources of "tension between the United States and Muslims around the world" in his 2009 Cairo speech.

Third, an overarching organizing policy framework called "Muslim engagement" was developed as a follow-up to the president's Cairo speech (Lynch 2010, 18-20). Under this framework, Obama pulled together, restructured and expanded many of the overt and covert public diplomacy initiatives launched by the Bush administration. Above all, Obama structured "Muslim engagement" around a set of new key offices and appointees, designed to overcome the coordination problems and bureaucratic silos encountered by the previous administration when framing policies around new civilizational lines. The cardinal institutional centers for formulating and delivering the "Muslim engagement" policy framework became: i) a newly appointed Special Representative to Muslim Communities; ii) a re-appointed Special Envoy to the OIC; and iii) a newly constituted Global Engagement Directorate in the NSC.

Farah Pandith, a Muslim American of Pakistani origin, was appointed as the first US Special Representative to Muslim Communities in 2009. Pandith had already worked in the NSC during the Bush years, in the various Muslim Outreach interagency coordinating committees from 2004-2007. Now she would lead efforts that "build respectful and strong long-term relationships between the U.S. government and Muslim communities", "support organic and credible alternative narratives that counter violent extremism", and build "networks of like-minded [i.e. pro-American] leaders" (Department of State 2011). Under her watch US embassies worldwide were increasingly tasked with hosting *iftar* dinners and actively connecting with Muslim leaders and communities. She has travelled widely to countries with significant Muslim populations, meeting and launching a broad range of grass-roots initiatives and exchange programs targeting Muslim youth, women, entrepreneurs, faith leaders, students, activists, bloggers, NGOs, and foundations.

Along with appointing a representative to Muslim *people*, president Obama also continued Bush's policy of appointing an envoy to Muslim *countries*. In 2010 Rashad Hussain was designated Special Envoy to the OIC. One of the characteristics that made Hussain a stand out candidate for the job, Obama explained, was that he knew the Koran by heart (BBC 2010). As Special Envoy, Hussain was tasked with strengthening business, health and technology partnerships with the OIC. He has also not shied away from publicly calling on Muslim religious leaders to go further in theologically denouncing terrorism and violence (Hussain 2010). During episodes of violence – such as those which left four American diplomats dead in Benghazi, Libya – Hussain has appeared on video quoting extensively from the Koran, to explain, among other things, that nowhere does Islam condone the assassination of innocents.[16]

A third institutional center concerned with "Muslim engagement" is a newly created Global Engagement Directorate in the NSC. The directorate was created to oversee public diplomacy and other government-to-people activities across the executive. However, much of its responsibilities

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(Contd.)

MEPI and BMENA (McInerney 2011, 3; Sharp 2010, 17).

[15] These terms are borrowed from Richard Haas (2009).

[16] See Al Jazeera's interview with Hussain: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RrkQhDNy8oY

during the first Obama administration were dedicated to formulating and coordinating the "Muslim engagement" agenda (Lynch 2010, 19). Under the watch of Pradeep Ramamurthy, a Washington intelligence and policy insider, the Directorate launched and expanded multimillion science and business initiatives addressed to Muslim countries (Ramamurthy 2010). Ramamurthy traveled to Muslim majority countries to meet with government officials, and secular and religious civil society groups, to help "address concerns and misperceptions about American attitudes towards Islam and Islam in America" (Wikileaks 2010).

Accompanying Obama's wider "Muslim engagement" framework, there has been a narrower and less public focus on activities known as "countering violent extremist" narratives (CVE). The introduction of the CVE concept was part of the strategy to de-emphasize, both in terms of discourse and – to some extent – practice, the notion of a 'global war of ideas' against an undistinguished and unified Islamist ideology. CVE's activities focused mainly on delegitimizing local and context specific Islamist discourses and anti-American narratives, rather than just on Al Qaeda's global narrative. At their core, however, CVE policies were very much in line with those of the previous administration. In fact the Obama administration ended up building upon "the initiatives of the last years of the Bush administration to empower, support and amplify credible voices inside the Muslim world [i.e. religious leaders and scholars] speaking out against extremists efforts" (Lynch 2010, p.20).

In 2011, as the Arab Spring was breaking out across the Middle East, Quintan Wiktorowicz, an expert in Islamic movements and radicalization, replaced Ramamurthy at the head of the Global Engagement Directorate. This appointment altered the directorate's focus from a broad engagement with all Muslims (whether entrepreneurs, youth, scientists, etc.), towards a more targeted attention paid to Islamist movements and CVE activities. Interestingly, the appointment reinforced and confirmed that the Directorate's chief responsibilities were to coordinate, in one way or another, the administration's policies dealing primarily with Muslim world matters.

As some perceptive critiques have noted, religio-cultural civilizational categories of "Islam" and "Muslims" have come to loom large in the foreign policy thinking, rhetoric and practices of the Obama administration (Roy and Vaisse 2008). The administration shifted towards a more conciliatory approach towards Muslims. Yet, in terms of policy arrangements targeting a distinct civilizational entity and space in world politics, Obama did not simply modify the practices and institutional architecture that his administration inherited from the Bush years, he also built upon and expanded it. Actors who saw world politics through a civilizational lens, this time calling for improved dialogue and engagement, were empowered and legitimized both within the administration (Dalia Mogahed, Eboo Patel, Farah Pandith, Rashad Hussain), as well as outside it (the copious investments poured into "Muslim people" through exchange programs, interfaith-dialogues and new economic and social programs, as well as greater engagement with the OIC). Indeed, during Obama's first term, Pandith pointed out how,

> Having worked on this issue [US-Muslim relations] for many years now and especially in the context of a post-9/11 world […] no other time in our history have we seen the kind of attention […] to the issue of engagement with Muslims around the world (2010).

Conclusion

Conceptually the paper offers a novel way of mapping out how civilizational analysis is developing within the discipline. Rather than dividing the way scholars approach civilizations along ontological lines (Jackson's distinction between attribute and process ontologies) or epistemological ones (Katzenstein's dispositional-discursive distinction), the paper has focused instead on four different lines of research: i) 'civilizational dynamics'; ii) 'inter-civilizational ethics'; iii) 'civilizational constructions'; and iv) 'deconstructing civilization/s'. These lines of research overlap, to some extent, with ontological and epistemological divisions proposed thus far, particularly in distinguishing between scholarly investigations that take civilizations as foundational to politics (i and ii), and those that take politics as foundational to civilizations (iii and iv). Thinking in terms of lines of research also

broadens the field by further dividing scholarship according to whether scholars have an analytical approach to theory (i and iii) or those that have a more normative/critical-emancipatory one (ii and iv).

The payoffs of mapping the field in this way are multiple. Most importantly, in terms of this paper, its utility lies in carving out in a more explicit way an approach to civilizational analysis that has received, quite surprisingly, little sustained theoretical and empirical attention thus far, 'civilizational constructions'. A 'civilizational constructions' approach is concerned with analyzing how individual and collective actors come to understand world politics and to act *as if* civilizations existed and mattered. And then teasing out how these actors socially and materially construct civilizations, both by embedding them in international practices and institutions, as well as by legitimizing individuals, organizations and/or states claiming to speak – in multiple and conflicting ways – on behalf of civilizations.

The paper's theoretical contributions in developing a more self conscious 'civilizational constructions' approach in IR are twofold. First, very much like Katzenstein's "primordiality" approach to civilizations, 'civilizational constructions' offers an important avenue for theoretically-conscious, empirically-minded, scholars to understand and explain the causes and consequences of important phenomena occurring in the world today. This approach moves beyond broad, abstract, theoretical debates which risk stalling around issues of whether civilizations exist, or not, and what their influence on international politics is. This is a debate that scholars in the 'civilizational dynamics', 'inter-civilizational ethics', and 'deconstructing civilization/s' traditions have been very much engaged in. 'Civilizational constructions' further recognizes that civilizational modes of thinking, practices and institutions are here with us today, and in many respects they have become social facts generating further social facts. Hence, there is a great need for a more thorough attention towards investigating these phenomena and their effects, rather than solely focusing – as 'deconstructing civilization/s' approach tends to do – on deconstructing civilizational discourses and attempting to theorize civilizations away.

Second, a 'civilizational constructions' framework seeks to refine and expand Katztenstein's "primordiality" approach. It does so by pointing out that civilizations can be viewed by social actors, and hence can come into being, not solely as essentialized/primordial clashing monoliths, but also as internally contested, non-essentialized entities, which engage with one another in multiple and complex ways. For instance, while in the post-Cold War and post-9/11 world both narratives of civilizational clashes and dialogues have been abundant in international relations, it seems that normative commitments to dialogue have actually been the most thickly institutionalized narratives – for example in the UN and, increasingly so, in American foreign policy during the Obama administration.

The empirical payoffs of a more clearly defined and self-conscious 'civilizational constructions' approach in IR generated *novel*, *nuanced* and *counter-intuitive* insights about American foreign policy. First, it helped to unpack in *novel* ways how, with the end of the Cold War, the Muslim world not only asserted itself as a new civilizational strategic frame of reference in the consciousness of American policy and intellectual elites. It also showed, in a step-by-step way, how the Muslim world progressively acquired materiality by becoming, after 9/11, a civilizational organizing principle of American foreign policy practices (symbolic speeches and gestures, travel itineraries, policies, initiatives and programs) and institutions (interagency coordinating bodies, special envoys and representatives). In the process there has been an ever deepening and expanding bureaucratization of relations between America and the "Muslims" identified as representing and speaking for a civilizational entity in world politics.

Second, a close scrutiny of American civilizational views and policies towards the Muslim world reveals a plurality of perspectives. The paper has highlighted the rather stark distinction between elites who view American-Muslim relations through a confrontational or a peaceful prism. Abundant literature exists on the way American perceptions of Islam – throughout history and particularly during the Bush administration – have been overwhelmingly marked by "orientalist" tropes, stereotyping and "othering" Muslims as incompatible with and hostile to Western/liberal values and interests (Kumar 2010; Lyons 2012; Mullin 2013; Salter 2002). The paper, however, sheds a more *nuanced* light on an under-investigated tradition among American elites that does not see Islam

and Muslims as overwhelmingly antagonistic to America; a tradition that has advocated for greater civilizational dialogue, understanding, and engagement, and one that has had important influences on the Obama presidency. Third, a 'civilizational constructions' lens has called attention also to essentializers and non-essentializers of Islam. This has revealed, rather *counter-intuitively,* that the Obama administration's "Good Islam-Bad Terrorists" civilizational discursive and policy framework, essentialized Islam and Muslims far more than the "Bad Muslims-Good Muslims" clash within the civilization perspective of the Bush administration.

To sum up, the case study shows, on the one hand, that, when it came to structuring foreign policy along civilizational lines, the Bush and Obama administrations have actually been marked more by continuity than change. On the other hand, it also reveals important discontinuities in terms of the diametrically opposite civilizational perspectives that ended up guiding the two administrations. Throughout, as new American foreign policy discourses, practices and institutions emerged, civilizational categories and actors identified with the Muslim world have acquired growing saliency in world politics. Overall, this paper has attempted to outline how IR scholars can, and why they should, do more to understand and explain how civilizational constructions affect, interact and transform the fundamental practices and institutions of international society.

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