

# Constructing civilisations: Embedding and reproducing the ‘Muslim world’ in American foreign policy practices and institutions since 9/11

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**Abstract.** Since 11 September 2001, the ‘Muslim world’ has become a novel religio-culturally defined civilisational frame of reference around which American foreign policy has been partly reoriented and reorganised. In parallel, the ‘Muslim world’, is increasingly becoming, at this historical juncture, a civilisational social fact in international politics by being progressively embedded in, and enacted onto the world by, American foreign policy discourses, institutions, practices, and processes of self-other recognition. This article theoretically understands and explains the causes and consequences of these changes through an engagement with the emerging post-essentialist civilisational analysis turn in International Relations (IR). In particular, the article furthers a constructivist civilisational politics approach that is theoretically, empirically, and methodologically oriented towards recovering and explaining how actors are interpreting, constructing, and reproducing – in this case through particular American foreign policy changes – an international society where intra- and inter-civilisational relations ‘matter’.

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World civilisations – rather than individuals, states, or geopolitical regions – have rarely been international social and political categories around which American foreign policy has been organised. Since the terrorist attacks of 11 September (9/11), however, ‘Islam’, ‘Muslims’, and the ‘Muslim/Islamic world’ have become important religio-cultural civilisational ‘strategic frames of reference’<sup>1</sup> towards which American

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<sup>1</sup> Fabio Petito, ‘In defence of dialogue of civilisations: With a brief illustration of the diverging agreement between Edward Said and Louis Massignon’, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 39 (2011), pp. 759–79, 767.

foreign policy has partly become reoriented. Indeed, how to confront, engage, win over, reach out to, or transform ‘Islam’ – as a cultural system – and the ‘Muslim world’ – as a set of cross-continental countries and a transnational category of more than a billion people believed to share a common religio-cultural identity – have become major policy preoccupations for both the George W. Bush and Barack Obama administrations.<sup>2</sup>

This is evident not just in presidential discourses, but most interestingly in the emergence of novel practices and institutions. Presidents have, for instance, increasingly adopted the practice of symbolic gestures by delivering speeches to an imagined Muslim community worldwide, either from mosques in Washington DC,<sup>3</sup> or centers of academic and Islamic learning in Cairo.<sup>4</sup> Countless diplomatic, economic, security, educational, inter-faith, developmental, and democracy-promotion initiatives have been launched targeted towards a hugely diverse group of people and countries across multiple continents because, from a US policymakers’ perspective, they are seen as sharing a common Islamic faith or Muslim identity.<sup>5</sup>

Institutions are changing too. As of 2014, the United States has come to hold two ‘ambassadors’ to the Muslim world: a Special Envoy to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and a Special Representative to Muslim Communities. In parallel social recognition and material resources have been ever more directed towards those individuals or collective actors who claim to speak for, or who are believed to represent, an Islamic/Muslim civilisation.

These are not solely remarkable foreign policy changes. They also challenge, at a deeper reading, our present understanding of international relations practices and theory. This article argues that, as American foreign policy becomes partly reorganized around the novel international category of the Muslim and the Muslim world, it contributes to ideationally and materially instantiate an international society where civilisational identities and boundaries *matter*. As such, American foreign policy is turning the Muslim world, what was hardly, especially before 9/11, a salient empirical and analytical category in world politics into a ‘social fact’.<sup>6</sup> Put differently, the Muslim world is increasingly becoming a constitutive element of international society by virtue of being enacted in and onto the world through a growing range of American foreign policy discourses, practices, institutional arrangements, and processes of self-other recognition.

<sup>2</sup> Considerable generalisation is involved when using terms like ‘Islam’, ‘Muslims’, ‘Muslim world’, and ‘Islamic world’, hence the quotation marks at this point, which will be omitted given that the article traces the persistent and increasingly uncontested use of these categories as identity markers in US foreign policy.

<sup>3</sup> George W. Bush, “‘Islam is Peace’ Says President: Remarks by the President at Islamic Center of Washington, DC”, available at: {<http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010917-11.html>} accessed 3 July 2013.

<sup>4</sup> Barack Obama, ‘President Obama Addresses Muslim World in Cairo’, available at: {<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/06/04/AR2009060401117.html>} accessed 3 July 2013}.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Hady Amr, ‘The opportunity of the Obama era: Can civil society help bridge divides between the United States and a diverse Muslim world?’, Analysis Paper 1 (Doha: Brookings Doha Center, 2009); GAO, ‘U.S. public diplomacy: State department efforts to engage Muslim audiences lack certain communication elements and face significant challenges’ (Washington, DC: United States Government Accountability Office (GAO), 2006); Marc Lynch, ‘Rhetoric and reality: Countering terrorism in the age of Obama’ (Washington DC: Center for a New American Security, 2010).

<sup>6</sup> Social facts are facts that ‘exist only because people collectively believe they exist and act accordingly’. Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, ‘Taking stock: the constructivist research program in International Relations and comparative politics’, *Annual Review of Political Science*, 4 (2001), pp. 391–416, 393.

This article theoretically makes sense of these developments by drawing from, and engaging with, the emerging ‘post-essentialist’<sup>7</sup> wave of civilisational analysis literature in IR. This literature has sought to broaden and complicate civilisational analysis beyond Samuel Huntington’s essentialist take on civilisational clashes.<sup>8</sup> The post-essentialist civilisational turn is hardly a coherent body of work. This article speaks to *interpretivist* strands in civilisational analysis, similar to what Patrick Thaddeus Jackson identifies as ‘participant specification’ perspectives.<sup>9</sup> Here, scholars investigate civilisations less as objective facts or processes. Attention is paid, instead, to recovering why and how participants in world politics come to make sense and/or talk about their reality in civilisational terms, and on the power that civilisational imaginaries exercise in world politics. Interpretivist perspectives on civilisational analysis can be divided between a well-treaded critical-reflexive line of research, and a less developed constructivist approach.

Critical-reflexive and constructivist perspectives differ mostly in the type of civilisational invocations they privilege in their exploration and what they understand these invocations as doing in international politics. Critical-reflexive approaches focus on deconstructing how discourses about civilisations-in-the-plural closely overlap with those of civilisation-in-the-singular.<sup>10</sup> The analysis centres mostly on unpacking the politics underpinning such discourses, and reveals how civilisational narratives are deployed, especially by Western actors, to opportunistically redraw exclusionary boundaries between civilised selves and uncivilised others, legitimise violent practices and sustain unequal power relations.<sup>11</sup> This line of research can be understood as focusing on ‘the politics of civilisation/s’.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Martin Hall and Patrick Thaddeus Jackson, ‘Introduction: Civilizations and International Relations theory’, in Hall and Jackson (eds), *Civilizational Identity: the Production and Reproduction of ‘Civilizations’ in International Relations* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 1–12, 4.

<sup>8</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, ‘The clash of civilizations?’, *Foreign Affairs*, 72 (1993), pp. 22–49; Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996).

<sup>9</sup> Patrick Thaddeus Jackson, ‘How to think about civilizations’, in Peter J. Katzenstein (ed.), *Civilizations in World Politics: Plural and Pluralist Perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 2010); see also Hall and Jackson (eds), *Civilizational Identity* (2007).

<sup>10</sup> There are two broad ways of thinking about civilisation/s: in the ‘plural’ and in the ‘singular’. As Johann Arnason, argues, civilisations-in-the-plural are invoked when discussing ‘the criteria for distinguishing and comparing civilizations, the ways of drawing boundaries between them, or the various inventories and typologies which have been proposed by analysts of the field’ (p. 1). Civilisations are understood as distinct macrocultural, macrosocial, and/or macrohistorical units or contexts, which may rise and fall and interact in multiple ways, across time and space. Civilisation-in-the-singular is used, instead, when speaking ‘of the origins, achievements or prospects of civilization’ (p. 1). Civilisation is thought of as progress, as a certain standard of economic, social, political, and cultural attainment that distinguishes the ‘civilised’ from the ‘uncivilised’. Johann P. Arnason, *Civilizations in Dispute: Historical Questions and Theoretical Traditions* (Leiden: Brill, 2003). Even if the two concepts of civilisation/s, plural and singular, are distinct, they are not necessarily mutually exclusive as critical-reflexive approaches highlight.

<sup>11</sup> Arshin Adib-Moghaddam, *A Metahistory of the Clash of Civilisations: Us and Them Beyond Orientalism* (London: C. Hurst & Co., 2011); Brett Bowden, *The Empire of Civilization: the Evolution of an Imperial Idea* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009); Christopher S. Browning and Marko Lehti (eds), *The Struggle for the West: a Divided and Contested Legacy* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2010); Alexandra Gheciu, *Securing Civilization? the EU, NATO, and the OSCE in the Post-9/11 World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Lene Hansen, *Security as Practice: Discourse Analysis and the Bosnian War* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2006); John M. Hobson, *The Eurocentric Conception of World Politics: Western International Theory, 1760–2010* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Patrick Thaddeus Jackson, *Civilizing the Enemy: German Reconstruction and the Invention of the West* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006).

<sup>12</sup> Gregorio Bettiza, ‘Civilizational analysis in International Relations: Mapping the field and advancing a ‘civilizational politics’ line of research’, *International Studies Review*, 16 (2014), pp. 1–28.

Constructivist perspectives, instead, are more concerned with teasing out the way participants come to imagine themselves, act, and transform world politics *as if* a plurality of civilisations existed and their relations mattered. Civilisations are treated as meaningful and discursively narrated ‘imagined communities’<sup>13</sup> or as ‘strategic frames of reference’,<sup>14</sup> around which agents structure their behaviour and reorganise international institutions and practices. This constructivist style of reasoning underpins what can be thought of as a ‘civilisational politics’ line of research.<sup>15</sup>

This article situates itself and seeks to further a constructivist civilisational politics perspective. Critical-reflexive research on the politics of civilisation/s has been amply developed and applied to investigate America’s, and especially the Bush administration’s, reaction to 9/11.<sup>16</sup> The same has not occurred with a constructivist civilisational politics perspective. This article redresses this imbalance and shows that there is much to be gained by bringing a constructivist civilisational politics lens and the case of American foreign policy after 9/11 together.

On the one hand, a constructivist civilisational politics perspective sheds greater light on changes and dynamics in American foreign policy, which more critical-reflexive scholarship has tended to overlook. Scholars taking a critical-reflexive approach have generally discounted: (i) the complexity of American domestic debates about Islam and the Muslim world; (ii) the role on American foreign policy of civilisations-in-the-plural discourses, as opposed to civilisation-in-the-singular ones; (iii) the continuities as well as differences between the Bush and Obama administrations; and (iv) the productive power of American foreign policy in turning the Muslim world into a constructed social fact.

On the other hand, an in-depth case study on the reification of the Muslim world in American foreign policy provides a useful springboard to theoretically, methodologically, and empirically advance a constructivist civilisational politics line of research. Most literature close to this perspective tends to focus on mapping multiple and distinct discourses of civilisations-in-the-plural across time and space,<sup>17</sup> but pays much less attention to tracing how agents articulating these discourses transform established institutions and practices in international society around civilisational categories. This article adopts a framework that directs constructivist civilisational politics research more consistently towards both understanding meanings *and* explaining outcomes.<sup>18</sup> In particular, the article calls for greater attention to combining

<sup>13</sup> Bettiza, ‘Civilizational analysis’; Jacinta O’Hagan, *Conceptualizing the West in International Relations: From Spengler to Said* (Houndmills, NY: Palgrave, 2002).

<sup>14</sup> Petito, ‘In defence’.

<sup>15</sup> Bettiza, ‘Civilizational analysis’.

<sup>16</sup> Deepa Kumar, ‘Framing Islam: The resurgence of Orientalism during the Bush II era’, *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 34 (2010), pp. 254–77; Corinna Mullin, *Constructing Political Islam as the New Other: America and Its Post-War on Terror Politics* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2013); Mustafa Kamal Pasha, ‘Civilizations, postorientalism, and Islam’, in Hall and Jackson (eds), *Civilizational Identity* (2007), pp. 61–79; Mark B. Salter, *Barbarians and Civilization in International Relations* (London: Pluto Press, 2002); Mark B. Salter, ‘Not waiting for the barbarians’, in Hall and Jackson (eds), *Civilizational Identity* (2007), pp. 81–93.

<sup>17</sup> O’Hagan, *Conceptualizing*; O’Hagan, ‘Discourses of civilizational identity’, in Hall and Jackson (eds), *Civilizational Identity*, pp. 15–31; Catarina Kinnvall, ‘Civilizations, neo-Gandhianism, and the Hindu self’, *Civilizational Identity*, pp. 95–108; Peter G. Mandaville, ‘The heterarchic *Umma*: Reading Islamic civilization from within’, *Civilizational Identity*, pp. 135–48.

<sup>18</sup> Alexander Wendt, ‘On constitution and causation in International Relations’, *Review of International Studies*, 24 (1998), pp. 101–18.

methods of discourse analysis, to recover shared meanings, with process tracing,<sup>19</sup> to identify the multiple agents and mechanisms that bring about changes to American foreign policy that socially and materially instantiate civilisations in and onto the world.

The article is structured as follows. The next section surveys the current post-essentialist civilisational turn in IR and anchors the article to a constructivist civilisational politics approach. The third section outlines the methodological framework for conducting this type of research as it applies to investigating the causes and effects of American foreign policy change along civilisational lines. The fourth section presents the case study. Here, I map the emergence, from the 1990s onwards, of four distinct civilisational discourses about Islam and Muslims among a particular type of epistemic community, American ‘international affairs experts’. Then I trace the mechanisms and processes through which American foreign policy came to reify the Muslim world by becoming (partly) reorganised around some of these civilisational narratives, but not others, at different points in time during the Bush and then Obama administrations.

### Post-essentialist civilisational analysis in IR

Thinking about civilisations controversially entered IR when Samuel Huntington articulated his (in)famous ‘clash of civilisations’ thesis over two decades ago. Huntington’s arguments stimulated heated debates. Critiques – whether realist,<sup>20</sup> liberal,<sup>21</sup> historical materialist,<sup>22</sup> or postcolonial<sup>23</sup> – profoundly questioned both Huntington’s thesis as well as the wisdom of employing civilisational analysis as a framework to understand and explain international relations. As Huntington’s arguments were refused for being too simplistic, at best, if not pernicious, at worst, the very case for a civilisational perspective in IR was often rejected altogether.

Despite sustained criticism, debates about civilisations in world politics have continued to resonate, especially in public discourses and policy circles.<sup>24</sup> It is within this context that a new wave of, what Martin Hall and Patrick Thaddeus Jackson call, ‘post-essentialist’<sup>25</sup> civilisational analysis literature has emerged in IR willing to take a closer and deeper look at the analytical and empirical category of civilisation/s. This literature still maintains a profound scepticism of essentialist claims about civilisations as bounded, coherent, integrated, centralised, homogeneous, consensual, and static entities in clash,<sup>26</sup> yet it also marks a break from critiques wishing to throw the civilisational baby out with the Huntingtonian bathwater.

<sup>19</sup> See especially Audie Klotz and Cecelia Lynch, ‘Translating terminologies’, *International Studies Review*, 8 (2006), pp. 356–62; Amir Lupovici, ‘Constructivist methods: a plea and manifesto for pluralism’, *Review of International Studies*, 35 (2009), pp. 195–218; Vincent Pouliot, ‘“Subjectivism”: Toward a constructivist methodology’, *International Studies Quarterly*, 51 (2007), pp. 359–84.

<sup>20</sup> Stephen M. Walt, ‘Building up new bogeymen’, *Foreign Policy*, 106 (1997), pp. 176–89.

<sup>21</sup> G. John Ikenberry, ‘Just like the rest’, *Foreign Affairs*, 76 (1997), pp. 162–3.

<sup>22</sup> Fred Halliday, *Islam and the Myth of Confrontation: Religion and Politics in the Middle East* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2002).

<sup>23</sup> Edward Said, ‘The clash of ignorance’, *The Nation* (2001).

<sup>24</sup> See James F. Hoge, *The Clash of Civilizations? The Debate* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 2010).

<sup>25</sup> Hall and Jackson, ‘Introduction’, p. 4

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

Post-essentialist civilisational analysis is wide-ranging, anchored either to historical sociological, or constructivist, or critical-reflexive modes of inquiry. Historical sociological perspectives share with Huntington an interest in objectively delineating what civilisations are and do. *Contra* Huntington's homogeneous conflicting cultural monoliths, however, a historical sociological perspective understands civilisations as 'processes', 'relations', 'complexes', or 'constellations'. Civilisations are presented in a non-essentialised fashion, as constantly in flux, marked by considerable internal pluralism, differentiation and contestation, and seen as interacting in multiple and complex ways, often through peaceful engagements and exchanges rather than violent confrontations.<sup>27</sup>

This literature is not that amenable to investigating the processes and mechanisms by which Islam and the Muslim world have become consequential strategic frames of reference and an organising principle for American foreign policy. Historical sociological approaches to civilisational analysis seek to unpack with greater nuance than Huntington does, the civilisational context in which social and political agents live and interact. This perspective is less geared, however, towards explaining how actors behave and when such context matters. If civilisations always existed, why is their invocation becoming increasingly widespread? How are these discourses, and the actors producing and reproducing them, transforming international practices and institutions? More specifically, if Islam and the Muslim world were always there, why are they appearing in the discursive and material structures of American foreign policy at this historical juncture?

To answer these questions, we need to bring in human agency and recover how actors interpret the world around them, act, and change international politics as if intra- and inter-civilisational relations mattered. This leads to an interpretivist, participant oriented, approach to civilisational analysis that underpins a well-established critical-reflexive approach and a less explored constructivist perspective.

The critical-reflexive perspective on civilisational analysis has grown exponentially over the years. Scholars taking this path problematise the political nature of knowledge and meaning production involved when invocations of civilisation/s are made. Investigations focus on deconstructing how discourses about civilisations-in-the-plural tend to overlap with those of civilisation-in-the-singular.<sup>28</sup> Scholars then trace how these discourses are opportunistically deployed to draw and reify boundaries between a *civilised* 'self' and an *uncivilised* 'other', in order to legitimise inclusionary/exclusionary practices and sustain unequal power relations.<sup>29</sup> This perspective can be identified with a line of research on 'the politics of civilisation/s'.<sup>30</sup>

A constructivist approach to civilisational analysis, seeks to tease out instead the multiple ways actors in international politics come to see and talk about themselves

<sup>27</sup> I use here historical sociology in a broad sense to include work by scholars that generally are identified with historical materialist or more structural-oriented constructivist modes of theorising. See Robert Cox, 'Thinking about civilizations', *Review of International Studies*, 26 (2000), pp. 217–34; John M. Hobson, *The Eastern Origins of Western Civilisation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Katzenstein (ed.), *Civilizations in World Politics*; Donald J. Puchala, 'International encounters of another kind', *Global Society: Journal of Interdisciplinary International Relations*, 11 (1997), pp. 5–29.

<sup>28</sup> On civilisations-in-the-plural and civilisation-in-the-singular see fn. 10.

<sup>29</sup> The critical-reflexive perspective is a broad tent that includes scholars working from critical theoretical, poststructural, postcolonial, and more postpositivist constructivist approaches. For examples, see fn. 11.

<sup>30</sup> Bettiza, 'Civilizational analysis'.

and others as situated in a plurality of civilisations.<sup>31</sup> As Jacinta O'Hagan points out, civilisational identities locate 'the immediate ethnic or national community within the context of a broader, cultural community, a transnational community, often extensive in geographical and temporal scope'.<sup>32</sup> Civilisations, are here understood as meaningful 'imagined communities'<sup>33</sup> or looser 'strategic frames of reference',<sup>34</sup> whose political saliency for actors in international society appears growing.

Rather than emphasising contingency and seeking to deconstruct civilisational discourses and identities, as critical-reflexive approaches do, a constructivist perspective directs greater attention towards mapping their intersubjective nature and tracing their impact on world politics. As Fred Halliday noted about the 'clash of civilisations' 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.'<sup>35</sup> Interpretivist-oriented scholars should not forgo the task of investigating the causal power of alleged 'myths' participants in world politics give meaning to. The interest from a constructivist perspective, hence, becomes exploring why and how thinking and talking about civilisations-in-the-plural brings civilisations into existence as social facts through the productive power of discourses,<sup>36</sup> by becoming embedded in and an organising principle around which institutions and practices are restructured,<sup>37</sup> and through processes of self-other recognition.<sup>38</sup> This can also be called a 'civilisational politics' line of research.<sup>39</sup>

How does this discussion about interpretivist approaches to civilisational analysis fit with American foreign policy? So far, American foreign policy – and in particular the Bush administration's response to 9/11 – has provided ample empirical material and a fertile ground for the development of a critical-reflexive approach focusing on the politics of civilisation/s.<sup>40</sup> A constructivist civilisational politics perspective, instead, has yet to be applied to understand and explain American foreign policy change. And, *vice versa*, American foreign policy has yet to be used as an in-depth case study to expand and further refine a constructivist civilisational politics line of research.

A constructivist perspective on civilisational analysis, compared to a critical-reflexive one, expands our understanding of the causes and effects of post-9/11 American foreign policy change, in two key ways. First, critical-reflexive scholarship has

<sup>31</sup> As Stefano Guzzini puts it, constructivism is in its broadest form about the social construction of meaning/knowledge and about the construction of social reality. Given these premises, the constructivism identified here is largely analytical-explanatory, rather than critical-reflexive, in character. This means it is less concerned with problematising the power-knowledge nexus, focusing instead on exploring the power that actors' meaning have in bringing about international change and in constituting social reality. Stefano Guzzini, *A Reconstruction of Constructivism in International Relations*, 6 (2000), pp. 147–82, 149.

<sup>32</sup> O'Hagan, *Conceptualizing*, p. 11.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, and Bettiza, 'Civilizational analysis'.

<sup>34</sup> Petito, 'In defence'.

<sup>35</sup> Halliday, *Islam*, 7.

<sup>36</sup> On discourses and social construction see, among many, Jennifer Milliken, 'The study of discourse in International Relations: a critique of research and methods', *European Journal of International Relations*, 5 (1999), pp. 225–54.

<sup>37</sup> On the power of institutions and, especially, practices in 'reify[ing] background knowledge and discourse in and on the material world', see Emanuel Adler and Vincent Pouliot, 'International Practices', *International Theory*, 3 (2011), pp. 1–36, 6.

<sup>38</sup> On recognition and identity construction see, among many, Richard Ned Lebow, 'Identity and International Relations', *International Relations*, 22 (2008), pp. 473–92.

<sup>39</sup> Bettiza, 'Civilizational analysis'.

<sup>40</sup> See fn. 16.

mostly recovered American discourses and unpacked foreign policy practices controversially associated with civilisation-in-the-singular logics. This focus ignores the multiple and contested understandings of civilisations-in-the-plural that underpin domestic expert debates about, and shape a growing range of American foreign policies towards Islam and the Muslim world as strategic civilisational frames of reference. Put differently, the war in Iraq and torture practices in Guantanamo, have been effectively accounted for by pointing at the role of civilising-in-the-singular discourses ‘othering’ Saddam Hussein and terrorists as beyond the (legal) pale. Such discourses, however, can hardly explain the proliferation of policy initiatives and institutional arrangements explicitly addressed to and structured around the international categories of Islam and the Muslim world more broadly.

Second, critical-reflexive investigations into American foreign policy have largely focused on the ‘us-civilised’ versus ‘them-uncivilised’ dichotomy that so markedly seemed to characterise the Bush years. As Richard Ned Lebow argues,<sup>41</sup> however, identities – and thus also civilisational ones – can become instantiated and maintained not just in terms of us *versus* them, but also in terms of us *and* them dichotomies. This is what appears happening under the Obama presidency, a period generally overlooked by critical-reflexive literature. Rather than emphasising the potential for conflict between America and so-called Muslims, Obama has instead sought to ‘reach out’, ‘engage’, and ‘dialogue’ with an imagined Muslim world – most evidently through his 2009 Cairo speech and a host of initiatives surrounding it.

Conversely, a detailed case study of American foreign policy change can advance theoretically and methodologically a constructivist civilisational politics approach in two ways. First, much research that can be identified with this interpretative perspective, seldom probes as wide and deep as this article does into the constitutive *and* causal power of civilisational-in-the-plural discourses in international politics. For instance, there is a growing literature offering detailed analysis of how social and political actors think and talk about themselves and others, in multiple and contested ways, as members of civilisations-in-the-plural.<sup>42</sup> A fine-grained explanation of how such imaginaries reorient actions, practices, and institutions rarely follows. Even less attention has been paid at how actors substantiate and fix the meaning of civilisations-in-the-plural at this historical juncture not just through discourse, but also by embedding them in the material structures of world politics. The case of American foreign policy change along civilisational imaginaries after 9/11 provides an ideal venue for exploring these dynamics.

Second, research that could be identified as adopting a civilisation politics perspective that simultaneously links actors’ ideas and discourses about civilisations to international outcomes, is rarely explicitly framed as such in the literature. For example, Michael Williams and Iver Neumann offer a theoretically sophisticated and empirically rich account of the background knowledge and discourses about Western identity leading to NATO’s enlargement following the end of the Cold War.<sup>43</sup> The authors, however, do not present their work in terms of, nor engage with, civilisational analysis debates. Hence, what this article offers is also a more self-aware approach towards a particular constructivist civilisational politics line of research.

<sup>41</sup> Lebow, ‘Identity and international relations’.

<sup>42</sup> See fn. 17.

<sup>43</sup> Michael C. Williams and Iver B. Neumann, ‘From alliance to security community: NATO, Russia, and the power of identity’, *Millennium-Journal of International Studies*, 29 (2000), pp. 357–87.



### Civilisational politics: Agents, discourses, mechanisms, and processes

This section presents a constructivist civilisational politics framework structured around two key complementary moments, understanding actors' meanings and explaining their outcomes.<sup>44</sup> Methodologically, it proposes to use discourse analysis to recover and map the emergence, from the 1990s onwards, of multiple domestic American expert civilisational-in-the-plural discourses about Islam and the Muslim world. It then suggests the mechanisms and conditions, to be explored through process tracing, that explain how policymakers internalised and (partially) restructured foreign policy along these civilisational narratives, contributing to reifying the Islamic and Muslim world in world politics, during the Bush and then Obama administrations.<sup>45</sup>

One useful way of mapping civilisational discourses is to build and expand upon what Peter Katzenstein defines as a 'primordially' approach to civilisations.<sup>46</sup> For Katzenstein primordially offers a *via media* between two poles in civilisational analysis: on the one hand the objectification of civilisations in 'dispositional' approaches (like Huntington's); and on the other hand the deconstruction of contingent civilisational invocations in what he calls 'discursive' approaches (similar to the critical-reflexive perspective highlighted here).

Primordially tends to put the accent on the most extreme and contentious processes of civilisational reification and social construction. Civilisations, 'come to exist', most problematically according to Katzenstein, when they are 'believed' and 'named' into existence in essentialist/primordialist terms and as closed, clashing entities like Huntington does.<sup>47</sup> This article makes more explicit the proposition, mostly latent in Katzenstein's discussion of primordially, that participants in world politics can and do equally bring civilisations into existence when framing them in non-essentialist ways, and when seeing them as potentially entering into dialogue and peaceful exchanges.

This insight, thus, opens up the interpretivist field of civilisational analysis to an exploration of how civilisations may be imagined and discursively framed by participants in world politics along two different axis: (i) as essentialised or non-essentialised entities; (ii) interacting either through violent clashes and confrontations or peaceful dialogue and engagements. These different modes of understanding and talking about what civilisations are and how they relate can be stylised in a four-quadrant graph (see Graph 1). This graph will help map the different civilisational discourses about Islam and the Muslim world increasingly put forward by American international affairs experts from the 1990s onwards.

Upon their articulation, four conditions can explain the authority and resonance of civilisational discourses among American policymakers. First, is the public prestige of the framers. Civilisational discourses gain authority by being articulated by 'international affairs experts' – a loose and broad set of intellectual elites that includes social scientists, area specialists, policy analysts, and experts (or supposed experts) of Islam and Islamist movements – tied to leading American academic institutions and/or think

<sup>44</sup> Wendt, 'On constitution and causation'.

<sup>45</sup> On combining discourse analysis with process tracing see Klotz and Lynch, 'Translating terminologies'; Lupovici, 'Constructivist methods'; Pouliot, "'Subjectivism'".

<sup>46</sup> Katzenstein, 'A world', pp. 12–13.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13

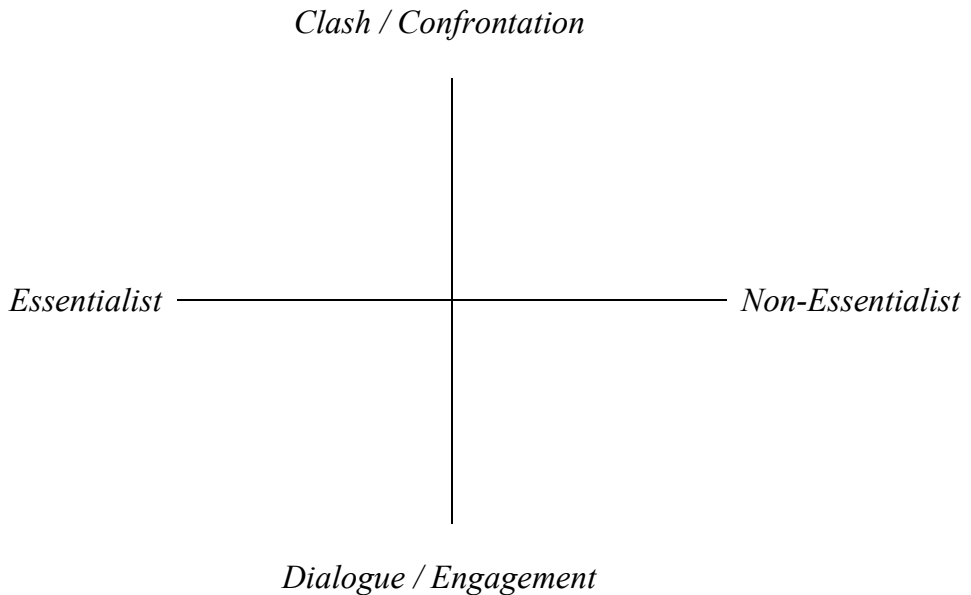


Figure 1. *Civilisational discourses*

tanks. Taken together, these experts constitute an important epistemic community, a ‘network of professionals with recognized expertise and competence’ and ‘an authoritative claim to policy-relevant knowledge’<sup>48</sup> in foreign affairs, in general, and the Middle East, Islam and the Muslim world, in particular.

Second, these discourses resonance by overlapping with and drawing from longer established American ‘traditions’<sup>49</sup> of thinking about domestic and international politics, whether conservative and realist or progressive and liberal. Third, American expert civilisational discourses about Islam and the Muslim world resonate also because these can be placed in a wider international context of events and meanings. Indeed they appear to ‘match’ with the spread of political Islam and Muslim identity politics worldwide, stretching from Morocco to Indonesia, from the Middle East to South Asia, and championed by actors as diverse as the Muslim Brotherhood, *Al-Qaeda*, heads of states of Muslim-majority countries, or the OIC.<sup>50</sup>

Fourth, ‘exogenous shocks’ can open important windows of opportunity for reconsidering standard foreign policy practices and including new approaches in policymaking. As policymakers face fundamental ‘dilemmas’<sup>51</sup> on how to interpret and respond to crisis, expert discourses can provide authoritative set of ideas presidents and government officials can draw upon. The attacks of 9/11 were such a shock

<sup>48</sup> Peter M. Haas, ‘Introduction: Epistemic communities and international policy coordination’, *International Organization*, 46 (1992), pp. 1–35, 3.

<sup>49</sup> Mark Bevir, Oliver Daddow, and Ian Hall, ‘Introduction: Interpreting British foreign policy’, *The British Journal of Politics & International Relations*, 15 (2013), pp. 163–74.

<sup>50</sup> Mohammed Ayoob, *The Many Faces of Political Islam: Religion and Politics in the Muslim World* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2008); Gilles Kepel, *Jihad: the Trail of Political Islam* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2002); Olivier Roy, *Globalized Islam: the Search for a New Ummah* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

<sup>51</sup> Bevir, Daddow, and Hall, ‘Introduction’.

and expert civilisational discourses would help give meaning to the uncertain international environment America found itself by: (i) defining international categories and actors;<sup>52</sup> (ii) and providing a set of ‘principled’, ‘causal’, and ‘policy’<sup>53</sup> ideas around which to structure the formulation and execution of foreign policy.

Recovering and mapping discourses, along with identifying the conditions that make them authoritative, only indirectly explain change. Two further causal mechanisms help to illuminate how American expert discourses about Islam and the Muslim world would lead to foreign policy change. The first is *persuasion*. Persuasion, is ‘a social process of communication that involves changing beliefs, attitudes, or behavior in the absence of overt coercion. It entails convincing someone through argument and principled debate.’<sup>54</sup> Persuasion, that is socialising others in new ideas, is more likely to occur under certain conditions: (i) when ‘the target of the socialization attempt is in a novel and uncertain environment and, thus, cognitively motivated to analyze new information’; (ii) when ‘the target has few prior, ingrained beliefs that are inconsistent with the socializing agency’s or individual’s message’; and (iii) when ‘the socializing agency or individual is an authoritative member of the in-group to which the target belongs or wants to belong’.<sup>55</sup>

The second mechanism is, what I call, the *revolving door practice*. Experts influence policymaking by acquiring bureaucratic positions.<sup>56</sup> This process is facilitated by the revolving door practice: a highly institutionalised practice in the United States constituted by the ease with which scholars and policy analysts, on the one hand, and policymakers and government officials, on the other, move back and forth between positions in universities and think tanks, and assignments in the government. This practice constitutes, to quote Joseph Nye, ‘one of the most effective transmission belts for ideas to travel from the academy to government’.<sup>57</sup> Thanks to the revolving door, experts have direct, rather than mediated, access to the policymaking process. Experts, and their new ideas, are likely to be called into government under similar conditions that facilitate persuasion: uncertain times, ideological affinity, in-group belonging.

## Narrating, embedding, and reproducing the Muslim world in American foreign policy

### *American expert civilisational discourses*

Civilisational discourses about Islam and the Muslim world appeared most prominently in American public policy debates from the early 1990s onwards. The end of

<sup>52</sup> For discourses as schemas that define categories of thought and action, see Milliken, ‘The study of discourse’, pp. 231–36.

<sup>53</sup> Principled beliefs are ‘beliefs about right and wrong’ prescribing the appropriate norms of conduct; causal beliefs are ‘beliefs about cause-effect, or means-end, relationships’; and policy ideas are ‘special programmatic ideas that derive from causal or principled beliefs or from ideologies ... ideas that facilitate policymaking by specifying how to solve particular policy problems’. Nina Tannenwald, ‘Ideas and explanation: Advancing the theoretical agenda’, *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 7 (2005), pp. 13–42, 16.

<sup>54</sup> Jeffrey Checkel, ‘Tracing causal mechanisms’, *International Studies Review*, 8 (2006), pp. 362–70, 364.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> Haas, ‘Introduction’, p. 30.

<sup>57</sup> Quoted from James G. McGann, ‘European think tanks: Regional and trans-Atlantic trends’, Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program, University of Pennsylvania, 2009, p. 16.

the Cold War brought about a period of rapid international change. Ensuing processes of economic globalisation increasingly appeared to undermine the centrality of the state and national identities, in favour of transnational ones. In parallel, American foreign policy and troops became ever more entangled in the Middle East and North African region from the First Gulf War onwards. Concomitantly, social and political dynamics were bringing to the fore in Middle Eastern politics, and beyond, a wide range of domestic and transnational actors claiming to be inspired by Islam. It was in this context, and especially following the attacks of 9/11, that significant sections of the American intellectual establishment would increasingly focus on the place of civilisations, culture, and religion, in general, and that of Islam and the Muslim world, in particular, in foreign affairs. Using Graph 1 to map civilisational discourses, it is possible to distinguish between four ideal-typical American expert discourses about Islam and the Muslim world that emerged at this time (see Graph 2).

On the graph's upper side are those who, rooted in more conservative and realist intellectual traditions, view American-Muslim world relations as marked by possible clashes or confrontations. The 'Bad Islam-Good West' perspective (where clash meets essentialism) is most explicitly articulated by prominent political scientists and area studies scholars, such as Samuel Huntington and Bernard Lewis. Their writings, appearing in the early 1990s on popular journals such as *Foreign Affairs* and *The Atlantic*, had great influence in setting the parameters around which public policy debates about Islamist movements, in particular, and the Muslim world, more generally, would be conducted thereafter in Washington.

The 'Bad Islam-Good West' perspective presents Islam as a coherent cultural system where something has gone awfully 'wrong'.<sup>58</sup> Islamism, as political ideology, is hardly distinguished from Islam, as a culture and religion. The former is considered 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 underlying problem for the West is not Islamic fundamentalism. It is Islam, a different civilisation whose people are convinced of the superiority of their culture and are obsessed with the inferiority of their power', Huntington argues and continues, 'The problem for Islam is not the CIA or the US Department of Defense. It is the West, a different civilization whose people are convinced of the universality of their culture.'<sup>59</sup> The Cold War ideological struggle, hence, is being replaced by a confrontation of cultures between the secularised 'Judeo-Christian West' and the 'Islamic world'.<sup>60</sup> Policy-wise, given the deep historical roots of this Muslim malaise, the West can do little to change the course of events except retreating from attempting to universalise its values while preparing for the possibility of civilisational clashes.

The 'Bad Muslims-Good Muslims'<sup>61</sup> discourse (where clash meets non-essentialism) is most vigorously articulated by individuals and institutions closely associated with the neoconservative movement. These range from policy analysts and pundits linked

<sup>58</sup> Bernard Lewis, 'What went wrong?', *Atlantic Monthly*, 289 (2002), pp. 43–5.

<sup>59</sup> Huntington, *The Clash*, pp. 217–18.

<sup>60</sup> Huntington, 'The clash of civilizations?'; Huntington, *The Clash*; Bernard Lewis, 'The roots of Muslim rage', *The Atlantic Monthly*, 266 (1990), pp. 47–60; Bernard Lewis, 'The West and the Middle East', *Foreign Affairs*, 76 (1997), pp. 114–30.

<sup>61</sup> I borrow language from Mahmood Mamdani, 'Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: A political perspective on culture and terrorism', *American Anthropologist*, 104 (2002), pp. 766–75.

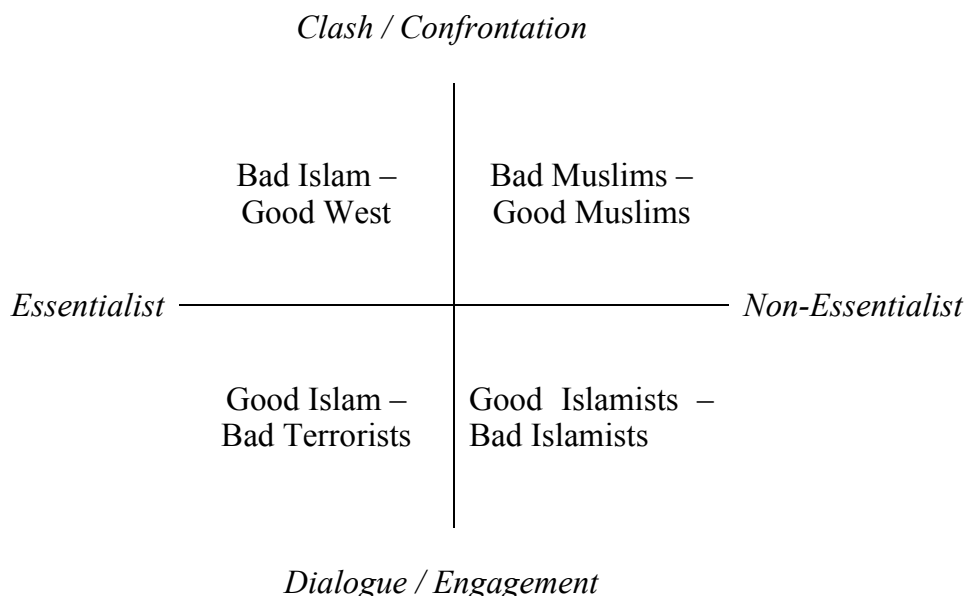


Figure 2. American expert civilisational discourses

to the American Enterprise Institute (AEI),<sup>62</sup> to reports by the RAND Corporation<sup>63</sup> or the Hudson Institute,<sup>64</sup> or people like Daniel Pipes of the Middle East Forum.<sup>65</sup> It is a non-essentialist perspective because those holding it 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 broadly in two camps along the lines of violent ‘Bad Muslims’ and peaceful ‘Good Muslims’, seen as locked in a ‘war of ideas’ or a ‘clash within a civilisation’ for the future direction of Islam.

‘Good Muslims’ are secular (Egypt’s Mubarak) or Islamic pro-Western governments (Saudi Arabia). ‘Bad Muslims’ are instead Islamists of all strides, from globalised terrorist networks (*Al-Qaeda*), to domestic movements (the Muslim Brotherhood, Hezbollah, or Hamas), or anti-Western states (Iran). These different actors are generally labelled ‘Islamic fundamentalists’, ‘Islamofascists’, or ‘militant Islamists’. ‘Bad Muslims’ are considered a security threat because of their perceived hostility

<sup>62</sup> See, for example, David Frum and Richard N. Perle, *An End to Evil: How to Win the War on Terror* (New York: Random House, 2003); Joshua Muravchik and Charlie Szrom, ‘In Search of Moderate Muslims’, American Enterprise Institute, available at: {<http://www.aei.org/article/foreign-and-defense-policy/regional/middle-east-and-north-africa/in-search-of-moderate-muslims>} accessed 20 October 2013; Norman Podhoretz, *World War IV: the Long Struggle Against Islamofascism* (New York: Doubleday, 2007).

<sup>63</sup> Cheryl Benard, ‘Civil Democratic Islam: Partners, Resources, and Strategies’, RAND Corporation Report (2003); RAND, ‘The Muslim world after 9/11’, *Project Air Force*, RAND Corporation Report, (2004); Angel Rabasa, Cheryl Benard, Lowell H. Schwartz, and Peter Sickle (eds), ‘Building moderate muslim networks’, *Center For Middle East Public Policy*, RAND Corporation (2007).

<sup>64</sup> See, for example, the series *Trends in Islamist Ideology*, available at: {<http://www.currenttrends.org/>} accessed 20 October 2013.

<sup>65</sup> For a more detailed overview of neoconservative thinking on Islam and the Muslim world, see Timothy J. Lynch, ‘Kristol Balls: Neoconservative visions of Islam and the Middle East’, *International Politics*, 45 (2008), pp. 182–211.

to 'American values', as well as to America's interests in the Middle East, whether oil, Israel, or stemming nuclear proliferation. This global deterritorialised force within Islam, but not Islam itself as a religion, is considered an evil similar to Communism and Nazism. Policy-wise, America is exhorted to mobilise all its ideological and military resources to confront the new totalitarian threat coming from 'Bad Muslims' by vigorously promoting liberal values and institutions in the Muslim world.

On the *dialogue | engagement* bottom half of the graph reside those who, drawing from progressive and liberal traditions, challenge narratives of clash. Those holding a 'Good Islam-Bad Terrorists' perspective (where dialogue meets essentialism) includes secular scholars and policy analysts, as well as Muslim leaders with considerable presence in Washington's policy debates. Among the secular experts are those associated with the Brookings Institute's *Project on US Relations with the Islamic World* (since 2004), such as Professors Akbar Ahmed and Peter Mandaville; Georgetown University's *Talal Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding* (since 1993), directed by John Esposito and John Voll; New York University's *Center for Dialogues: Islamic World-US-The West* (since 2001), directed by Mustapha Tlili; and the *Leadership Group on US-Muslim Engagement*, led among others by Madeleine Albright.<sup>66</sup> Important religious and inter-faith voices include those of imam Feisal Abdul Rauf, leader of the park-51 initiative in New York, and Eboo Patel, an inter-faith youth activist.

The 'Good Islam-Bad Terrorists' discourse calls for greater intercivilisational engagement, better understanding of the Muslim world, and the development of a broad-based relationship with over one billion members of the world's population who – while understood to be extremely diverse – are perceived as sharing a common religious and cultural bond, and possibly a growing belief that America is at war with them. Violent Islamists are presented as an exception, a loud minority of extremists that instrumentally use and distort Islam. Terrorists are seen as the product of political and socioeconomic forces, not culture or religion. This is a civilisational discourse because those articulating it do not simply distinguish between 'terrorists' and 'civilians', but feel compelled to essentialise 'real' Islam and Muslims as inherently peaceful, perfectly compatible with modernity, democracy, and American values.<sup>67</sup> If any 'battle of ideas' is taking place, a Brookings report suggests, it is 'between terrorist elements in the Muslim world and Islam'.<sup>68</sup> Policy-wise, America is called to promote the broadest possible socioeconomic engagement with Muslims around the world to dissipate misgivings.<sup>69</sup> Islam should be considered as one of America's 'strongest allies' in delegitimising terrorism<sup>70</sup> and the promotion of intercivilisational dialogues is touted as a desirable diplomatic tool to improve international understanding and cooperation.<sup>71</sup>

<sup>66</sup> US-Muslim Engagement Project, 'Changing course: A new direction for US relations with the Muslim world', Report of the Leadership Group on US-Muslim Engagement (Washington DC: 2009).

<sup>67</sup> See Akbar S. Ahmed, *Journey Into America: the Challenge of Islam* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2010); John L. Esposito and Dalia Mogahed, *Who Speaks for Islam? What a Billion Muslims Really Think* (New York: Gallup Press, 2007); John L. Esposito and John O. Voll, *Islam and Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

<sup>68</sup> Rashad Hussain and al-Husein N. Madhany, 'Reformulating the Battle of Ideas: Understanding the Role of Islam in Counterterrorism Policy', Analysis Paper, the Brookings Project on US Relations with the Islamic world (2008), p. ix.

<sup>69</sup> US-Muslim Engagement Project, 'Changing Course'.

<sup>70</sup> Hussain and Madhany, 'Reformulating', p. ix.

<sup>71</sup> Brian Forst and Akbar S. Ahmed, *After Terror: Promoting Dialogue Among Civilizations* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2005).

The 'Bad Islamist-Good Islamist' discourse (where dialogue meets non-essentialism) unpacks more thoroughly the phenomenon of political Islam and how this relates in complex and multifaceted ways to violence and terrorism. This perspective marks the scholarly output of leading academics on Islamism and Islam with important ties to foreign policy circles, such as John Esposito<sup>72</sup> and Peter Mandaville.<sup>73</sup>

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 rarely presented as a monolith, nor as a civilisational 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. Essentialisations of Islamism and Islam as either inherently violent or peaceful are abandoned in favour of viewing them as complex, fragmented, context and country specific forces, with which America can and should engage, rather than outright dismissing them as hostile and confrontational. This is a civilisational perspective because the Muslim world delineates the geocultural area where this complexity is explored and towards which American diplomacy and socioeconomic aid programmes should be nevertheless specifically targeted.

To sum up, since the 1990s, policy debates about the characteristics and possible threat of Islam and Muslims for America tended to take place between four distinct ideal-typical perspectives. While there are important differences between these perspectives, they all share a common civilisational frame of reference. They all portray Islam and the Muslim world, its internal dynamics and external relations with America, as a salient national security concern in the post-Cold War world. These multiple civilisational discourses are important because they provided the intellectual resources that successive American administrations would partly draw upon to organise their foreign policy response to 9/11.

### *Bush's 'war of ideas'*

As planes were flown into the symbols of American power at the shout of *Allahu Akbar* on 11 September 2001, Americans anxiously came to ask themselves 'why do they hate us?' The answers the Bush administration would give to who *they* were, became as important as addressing the causal *why* question, in defining American foreign policy from then onwards. In the initial uncertain stages following 9/11, policy thinking was in a state of flux. Civilisational discourses, and particularly essentialised clash of civilisations ones, were becoming ever more prominent in Washington foreign policy debates. Members of the Bush administration seemed however to rely on and dither, at the beginning, between three different discourses.

President Bush himself initially adopted a conciliatory Bad Terrorist-Good Islam perspective. In a symbolic gesture the president visited a famous mosque in Washington DC on 17 September. 'These acts of violence against innocents violate the fundamental tenets of the Islamic faith', Bush explained and continued, 'The face of terror is not the

<sup>72</sup> See John L. Esposito, *Islam and Politics* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1991); John L. Esposito, *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality?* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); John L. Esposito, *The Future of Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

<sup>73</sup> See Peter G. Mandaville, *Transnational Muslim Politics: Reimagining the Umma* (London: Routledge, 2001); Peter G. Mandaville, *Global Political Islam* (London: Routledge, 2005).

true faith of Islam. That's not what Islam is all about. Islam is peace.<sup>74</sup> In his speech, Bush unequivocally praised 'Islam', while singling out 'terrorists' as the source of America's troubles.

Confrontationist ideas were also taking hold in the administration. Vice-President Dick Cheney was probably among those who most closely came to adopt a Good West-Bad Islam outlook, shaped and influenced by his reported admiration and interactions with scholars like Bernard Lewis.<sup>75</sup> Neoconservatives were another key constituency informing the administration's post-9/11 views. Neoconservative policy-makers, such as Elliot Abrams, Paul Wolfowitz, Lewis 'Scooter' Libby, Richard Perle, Douglas Feith, and Zalmay Khalilzad, held important positions in the administration. Their views largely mirrored those of their peers at the AEI and RAND, along the lines of a non-essentialist confrontational discourse, highlighting the clash within a civilisation between 'bad extremist' and 'good moderate' Muslims.<sup>76</sup>

As America's reaction to 9/11 took shape, neoconservatives' influence grew within the administration.<sup>77</sup> In the process, neoconservatives would also win the argument over how to frame who those that attacked the United States were and what America's response should be. Despite his initial dialogical approach, President Bush was increasingly persuaded by the neoconservative Bad Muslim-Good Muslim civilisational perspective. This became evident with the 2002 National Security Strategy (NSS). The document shows how the administration's view of the security threat posed by *Al-Qaeda* crystallised around the neoconservative discourse. Terrorism and the war against it, the 2002 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.'<sup>78</sup> From then on fighting the 'war of ideas' against 'Islamofascism' – neoconservative terms which came progressively also to permeate Bush's rhetoric<sup>79</sup> – became central concerns.

Winning was to be achieved through restructuring American foreign policy along two broad strategies with civilisational contours. The first of these strategies, was to carry out an active military, diplomatic, and aid campaign to reform and promote liberal values – seen by neoconservatives as a potent antidote to Islamism – in the Muslim-demarcated 'broader Middle East'.<sup>80</sup> Making the case for the war against Saddam Hussein at the UN in 2002, Bush linked Iraq to the ongoing military intervention in Afghanistan and diplomatic efforts to promote elections in the Palestinian

<sup>74</sup> See fn. 3.

<sup>75</sup> Dick Cheney, 'Vice President's Remarks at the World Affairs Council of Philadelphia Luncheon Honoring Professor Bernard Lewis', available at: {<http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2006/05/20060501-3.html>} accessed 20 October 2013. See also Ian Buruma, 'Lost in translation', *The New Yorker*, available at: {[http://www.newyorker.com/printables/critics/040614crbo\\_books](http://www.newyorker.com/printables/critics/040614crbo_books)} accessed 20 October 2013.

<sup>76</sup> For instance, Elliot Abrams, who in Bush's National Security Council (NSC) held key senior advisory positions on democracy promotion and the Middle East, has repeatedly argued that the 'struggle against Islamic extremism is a battle of ideas as well as a military and police activity'. For Abrams, focusing on 'fighting terrorist attacks' is not sufficient to win this war, America needs to '[fight] Islamic extremism' more broadly. Elliott Abrams, 'The Citizen of the World Presidency', available at: {<http://www.commentarymagazine.com/article/the-citizen-of-the-world-presidency-1>} accessed 20 October 2013.

<sup>77</sup> Francis Fukuyama, 'The neoconservative moment', *The National Interest*, 76 (2004), pp. 57–68; Jimm Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans: the History of Bush's War Cabinet* (New York: Viking, 2004).

<sup>78</sup> NSS, 'The National Security Strategy of the United States of America' (2002), available at: {<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/policy/national/nss-020920.pdf>} accessed 20 October 2013.

<sup>79</sup> See {<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/4785065.stm>} accessed 20 October 2013.

<sup>80</sup> See Katerina Dalacoura, 'U.S. democracy promotion in the Arab Middle East since 11 September 2001: a critique', *International Affairs*, 81 (2005), pp. 963–79; and Lynch, 'Kristol Balls', p. 201.



territories. The president conceptually framed the Iraq intervention, as part of a broader strategy to inspire democratic ‘reforms throughout the Muslim world’.<sup>81</sup>

Alongside forcible approaches to regime change, in 2002 the administration rolled out ‘a complementary soft side’ to its democracy promotion efforts.<sup>82</sup> The centrepiece of these efforts would be the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), described by Richard Haas, then Director of Policy Planning in the State Department, as an attempt to ‘expand political participation, support civil society, and fortify the rule of law [in] Muslim nations’.<sup>83</sup> By 2009, MEPI had contributed over \$530 million to implement more than 600 projects in 17 countries and territories.<sup>84</sup>

While MEPI was designed to channel growing resources to ‘Muslim nations’, as Haas had put it, the initiative was mostly targeted to Middle Eastern states. It was thus designed around long-standing geographical-regional boundaries, rather than Muslim civilisational ones. A concrete step in this direction was made when, in 2005, the Broader Middle East and North Africa (BMENA) Initiative was launched. The initiative was designed to be a multilateral development and reform plan aimed at, as a report for the US Congress puts it, ‘fostering economic and political liberalization in a wide geographic area of Arab and non-Arab Muslim countries’.<sup>85</sup>

The second strategy of the Bush administration revolved around implementing a wide range of so-called ‘Muslim-specific initiatives’,<sup>86</sup> designed to win the supposed war of ideas taking place in the Muslim world. These initiatives consisted in a far-reaching public diplomacy and communication strategy designed to overtly and covertly reach out and improve America’s image among those who were identified as Muslims, and support ‘good Muslims’ while undermining Islamists’ narratives and discrediting Islamist ideology by influencing theological and political debates among secular and religious elites and publics.

Tellingly, when ramping up these types of activities, the Bush administration faced a number of institutional obstacles in reorganising bureaucracies to effectively deliver policies along new civilisational lines. Improving the effectiveness, encouraging the coordination, and giving a direction to an ever-expanding pool of Muslim-focused initiatives launched in the aftermath of 9/11 across the foreign policy apparatus, thus, became an important item on the agenda.

A number of successive interagency groups were formed with this purpose in mind. In 2004, a Muslim World Outreach Policy Coordination Committee (PCC), co-chaired by the NSC and the State Department was created to develop a coordinated strategy for winning the war of ideas in the Muslim world.<sup>87</sup> A public diplomacy strategy was then rolled out in 2007 which sought to ‘isolate and marginalize

<sup>81</sup> ‘George Bush’s Speech to the UN General Assembly’, available at: {<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2002/sep/12/iraq.usa3>} accessed 20 October 2013.

<sup>82</sup> Thomas Carothers, ‘Democracy: Terrorism’s uncertain antidote’, *Current History* (2003), pp. 403–6, 403.

<sup>83</sup> Richard N. Haas, ‘Toward greater democracy in the Muslim world’, *Washington Quarterly*, 26 (2003), pp. 137–48, 144.

<sup>84</sup> See {<http://www.state.gov/p/nea/rls/rm/2009/123119.htm>} accessed 20 October 2013.

<sup>85</sup> Jeremy M. Sharp, ‘U.S. Foreign Assistance to the Middle East: Historical Background, Recent Trends, and the FY2011 Request’, CRS Report for Congress (Washington DC: 2010), pp. 19–20.

<sup>86</sup> GAO, ‘U.S. Public Diplomacy: Interagency Coordination Efforts Hampered by the Lack of a National Communication Strategy’ (Washington, DC: United States Government Accountability Office (GAO), 2005).

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

violent extremists' among so-called Muslims.<sup>88</sup> This goal would be achieved, among other, by actively engaging 'Muslim communities', amplifying 'mainstream Muslim voices', isolating and discrediting 'terrorist leaders and organizations', 'delegitimizing terror' as a tactic, and demonstrating that the 'West is open to all religions and is not in conflict with any faith.'<sup>89</sup>

Media campaigns, TV, newspapers, and radio broadcasting, started to be used to win the hearts and minds of Muslims. Radio Sawa and the TV station Al-Hurra were launched, in 2002 and 2004, to convey American messages to Arab and Muslim audiences. An ever-expanding range of exchange programmes and interfaith activities directed to a category of people identified of their supposed *Muslimness* – whether youth, students, academics, business people, and religious leaders – became a central component of the administration's outreach efforts.<sup>90</sup> Karen Hughes, Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy (2005–7), toured countries across continents understood to be part of the Muslim world, from Indonesia, to Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Turkey. Here she would meet with women and youth representatives, and organised interfaith dialogues among local Christian, Jewish, and Muslim communities.<sup>91</sup>

Great efforts were made to tarnish *Al-Qaeda's* image. Reports at the time revealed that the CIA was carrying out covert programmes targeting Islamic media, religious leaders, and political parties.<sup>92</sup> The US increasingly worked through 'credible third parties',<sup>93</sup> in other words through Muslim religious leaders and opinion-makers, to delegitimise *Al-Qaeda's* narrative and terrorist tactics as un-Islamic. During James Glassman's stint as Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy (2008–9), State Department resources were frequently 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'.<sup>94</sup> *Madrasahs* (religious schools), particularly those producing anti-American Islamist ideology, became a concern and programmes geared to reforming them were launched.<sup>95</sup>

Overall, by 2006, half-way through Bush's second term, the administration had come to launch a growing range of novel programmes and institutional arrangements premised on a non-essentialist confrontationist civilisational perspective designed to win America's supposed clash with 'bad Muslims' while seeking to support and grow the pool of so-called 'moderate Muslims' within the boundaries of a newly-defined Islamic world. The administration was spending rising amounts of resources on these initiatives too. A Brookings report, estimated that in 2006

<sup>88</sup> PCC, 'U.S. National Strategy for Public Diplomacy and Strategic Communication' (Washington: Communication and Public Diplomacy Policy Coordinating Committee (PCC), 2007), p. 3.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> See Amr, 'The opportunity'.

<sup>91</sup> 'A U.S. ear in the Muslim world', *Asia Times*, available at: {[http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Front\\_Page/GK02Aa01.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Front_Page/GK02Aa01.html)} accessed 20 October 2013.

<sup>92</sup> David E. Kaplan, 'Of Jihad Networks and the War of Ideas', available at: {<http://www.usnews.com/usnews/news/articles/060622/22natsec.htm>} accessed 20 October 2013; David E. Kaplan, 'Hearts, Minds, and Dollars: In an Unseen Front in the War on Terrorism, America is Spending Millions ... To Change the Very Face of Islam', available at: {[http://www.usnews.com/usnews/news/articles/050425/25roots\\_print.htm](http://www.usnews.com/usnews/news/articles/050425/25roots_print.htm)} accessed 20 October 2013.

<sup>93</sup> Lynch, 'Rhetoric and reality', p. 15.

<sup>94</sup> See {<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2011/jul/20/obama-seeks-appropriate-balance-in-fighting-terror/?page=all>} accessed 20 October 2013.

<sup>95</sup> Emily Pease, 'U.S. Efforts to Reform Education in the Middle East', available at: {[http://yonseijournal.files.wordpress.com/2012/08/p23\\_1.pdf](http://yonseijournal.files.wordpress.com/2012/08/p23_1.pdf)} accessed 20 October 2013, pp. 8, 15.

alone, the US was spending at least \$437 million on public diplomacy initiatives specifically designed to target – as the report put it – ‘Arab and Muslim populations’.<sup>96</sup>

Towards the end of his second term, driven mostly by the failures of Iraq, President Bush progressively sidelined neoconservatives in his administration. In the process, the president also abandoned the Bad Muslims-Good Muslims outlook that had characterised his presidency until then. Scholars and former members of Bush’s administration, such as William Inboden, have suggested that the president did realise that by declaring a war between America and ‘Islamofascism’, the United States had come very close to reproduce a clash of civilisation narrative between the West and Islam,<sup>97</sup> a narrative that also unwittingly seemed to legitimise Osama Bin Laden as a serious – although misguided – representative of Islamic beliefs and civilisation.<sup>98</sup>

Bush reverted towards his initial instinct of a less confrontational approach towards the Muslim world. 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 America’s first Special Envoy to the OIC. ‘The core of [Sada Cumber’s] mission’, Bush argued, ‘is to explain to the Islamic world that America is a friend.’<sup>99</sup> Yet, it was not until a new administration entered the White House that greater efforts at dialogue and engagement with so-called Muslims and the Muslim world became further institutionalised.

### *Obama’s ‘engagement’ with the Muslim world*

Scholars and policy analysts in Washington DC, when critical of the Bush administration’s highly militarised and rhetorically divisive response to 9/11, often fell back on civilisational narratives themselves. Brookings launched in 2004 a yearly ‘US-Islamic World Forum’ to counter what it saw as the ‘virtual absence of dialogue between leaders of the United States and the Muslim world’.<sup>100</sup> Scholars like Esposito were pointing out that it was the War on Terror and its policy excesses (Iraq, Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib), rather than the absence of democracy or an atavistic hate of American values, which were responsible for the ‘widespread anti-Americanism among mainstream Muslims and Islamists’<sup>101</sup> that many polls at the time were registering.<sup>102</sup>

A typical refrain, among more liberal-oriented experts, was to criticise the Bush administration for mistaking the good Muslim forest for the rotten terrorist tree.

<sup>96</sup> Amr, ‘The opportunity’, p. 8.

<sup>97</sup> William Inboden, ‘Personal communication’, phone conversation, 29 June 2011. Inboden was Senior Director for Strategic Planning on the National Security Council during the second Bush administration.

<sup>98</sup> *Al-Qaeda* based much of its ideological appeal on a clash of civilisation narrative and an essentialisation of the West opposing Islam and Muslims. See, among many, Gilles Kepel and Pascale Ghazaleh, *Beyond Terror and Martyrdom: the Future of the Middle East* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).

<sup>99</sup> See {<http://www.c-spanvideo.org/program/SpecialIs>} accessed 20 October 2013.

<sup>100</sup> See {[www.brookings.edu/about/projects/islamic-world/us-islamic-world-forums](http://www.brookings.edu/about/projects/islamic-world/us-islamic-world-forums)} accessed 20 October 2013.

<sup>101</sup> John L. Esposito, ‘It’s the policy, stupid: Political Islam and US foreign policy’, *Harvard International Review* (2 May 2007).

<sup>102</sup> See {<http://www.pewglobal.org/2006/06/22/the-great-divide-how-westerners-and-muslims-view-each-other>} accessed 20 October 2013.

Akbar Ahmed, would argue that what America urgently needed was to ‘comprehend Islam, not only for the sake of its ideals (which included religious tolerance) but also for its geopolitical needs and strategy’.<sup>103</sup> Between 2007–8, a bi-partisan group of prominent policymakers, business people, and scholars of religion and Islam compiled a major report directed at any post-Bush administration with the suggestive title, ‘Changing Course: A New Direction for US Relations with the Muslim World’.<sup>104</sup>

Upon Bush’s departure, much of the foreign policy debate thus remained anchored within a civilisational discursive framework. This environment shaped the intellectual context in Washington DC at the time the new Democratic administration took office. Worried by America’s plummeting image and leadership abroad,<sup>105</sup> newly elected President Obama saw repairing the divide between the United States and, an ever more unproblematically reified, Muslim world as a pressing task.<sup>106</sup>

Obama’s approach developed along three main lines: (i) making highly symbolic gestures and shifting rhetoric to a more conciliatory tone towards so-called Muslims, as opposed to the confrontational one adopted by the previous administration; (ii) addressing contentious foreign policy issues, as opposed to solely pressing ahead with democracy promotion; and (iii) developing a policy framework that engaged *all* Muslims and *narrowly* targeted terrorists, as opposed to structuring discourses and policies around an understanding of a global war of ideas within Islam and against all Islamists.

What is salient here, is that the civilisational 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 a civilisational paradigm, President Obama shifted away from the Bad Muslims–Good Muslims narrative which dominated the Bush years towards a Good Islam–Bad Terrorist perspective on which the ‘Changing Course’ report was based. Indeed, the administration drew heavily from the recommendations of the ‘Changing Course’ report.<sup>107</sup>

The persuasiveness of the report within the president’s closest circles, can be explained with reference to the in-group and ideological affinity that many of the report’s most prominent authors, such as Madeleine Albright and Dennis Ross, enjoyed with the Democratic leadership. As Obama adopted the Good Islam–Bad Terrorist civilisational outlook, numerous international affairs experts holding this perspective were called upon – through the revolving door practice – to formulate and implement policy.

Dalia Mogahed, who among others participated in the drafting of the ‘Changing Course’ report, was invited along with Eboo Patel, an inter-faith activist, to sit on the President’s 25-member White House Advisory Council on Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships. The president tasked them with devising policies for better inter-religious cooperation.<sup>108</sup> Rashad Hussain, co-author of a Brookings re-

<sup>103</sup> Ahmed, *Journey*, p. 6. See, also, Forst and Ahmed, *After Terror*.

<sup>104</sup> See fn. 67.

<sup>105</sup> Barack Obama, ‘Renewing American leadership’, *Foreign Affairs*, 86 (2007), pp. 2–16.

<sup>106</sup> On Obama’s priorities see Amr, ‘The opportunity’, p. 7.

<sup>107</sup> For a detailed comparison of Obama’s strategy and the report see R S. Zaharna, ‘Obama, U.S. public diplomacy and the Islamic world’, *World Politics Review*, available at: {<http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/3450/obama-u-s-public-diplomacy-and-the-islamic-world>} accessed 20 October 2013.

<sup>108</sup> ‘A New Era of Partnerships: Report of Recommendations to the President’, President’s Advisory Council on Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships, Washington, DC (2010), pp. 69–93.

port titled 'Reformulating the Battle of Ideas: Understanding the Role of Islam in Counterterrorism Policy', became an important advisor on Muslim-related issues.

President Obama's first approach was to shift rhetoric on Islam and reach out to an unspecified imagined Muslim world through the practice of symbolic gestures and speeches. The president repeatedly used his oratory qualities and personal story<sup>109</sup> to underscore the common values and interests that united Americans and so-called Muslims, and to confront any lingering civilisational clash narratives. The culmination of this process was the president's Cairo 'New Beginning' speech in 2009, widely known and reported as Obama's speech to the Muslim world.<sup>110</sup> To a listening audience that went far beyond the highly emblematic Al-Azhar University where Obama spoke, the president would announce:

I have 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.<sup>111</sup>

In parallel, the administration used language that deemphasised the link between Islam and terrorism. References to the charged rhetoric of the War on Terror against radical Islam, in general, and the 'war of ideas' within Islam, in particular, were avoided during his inaugural address, and dropped from everyday discourses and policy reports. Obama's NSS, for instance, framed the terrorist threat in terms of 'defeating and disrupting violent extremists'.<sup>112</sup>

Obama's second approach focused on addressing particularly contentious policy issues which were perceived as aggravating relations with people understood as sharing a Muslim identity: the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, torture and Guantánamo, and the war in Iraq. The president would quickly appoint George Mitchell as Special Envoy to the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. Within the first month of the presidency, Obama signed executive orders to shut down Guantanamo and curb harsh forms of interrogation tantamount to torture. He also committed to withdrawing America's military operations from the unpopular war in Iraq, refocusing on the less controversial war in Afghanistan. While these policy shifts had national security merits on 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 pursued was tied to a desire of repairing America's standing among a certain category of people and countries. Indeed Obama would mention these very same issues as important sources of 'tension between the United States and Muslims around the world' in his Cairo address.

Third, an overarching organising programmatic framework generally referred to, within Washington policy circles and the administration, as 'Muslim engagement',<sup>113</sup> was developed as a follow up to Cairo and as an alternative to the neoconservatives'

<sup>109</sup> During his childhood Obama lived in Indonesia, he would often describe his Kenyan father as 'Muslim'.

<sup>110</sup> Before Cairo, Obama had also made similar conciliatory overtures towards a category of people and states singularly identified with their religious identity as Muslim and supposed shared beliefs in Islam. For instance during his inaugural address, in an early interview to Arab TV channels, and during a state visit in Turkey. For instance during his inaugural address, in an early interview to Arab TV channels, and during a state visit in Turkey.

<sup>111</sup> Obama, 'President Obama Addresses Muslim World', speech, Cairo, 2009.

<sup>112</sup> NSS, 'The National Security Strategy' (2010), available at: {[http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/rss\\_viewer/national\\_security\\_strategy.pdf](http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/rss_viewer/national_security_strategy.pdf)} accessed 20 October 2013, pp. 19–22.

<sup>113</sup> Lynch, 'Rhetoric and reality', pp. 18–20.

war of ideas paradigm. Under this framework, Obama pulled together, restructured, and expanded many of the overt and covert Muslim-specific public diplomacy initiatives launched by the Bush administration. America's now broader outreach to so-called Muslims was organised around a set of new offices and appointees, designed to overcome the coordination problems and bureaucratic silos encountered by the previous administration when framing policies around newly imagined civilisational lines.

The cardinal institutional centers for formulating and delivering policies associated with the Muslim engagement agenda, were: (i) a newly appointed Special Representative to Muslim Communities; (ii) a reconfirmed Special Envoy to the OIC; and (iii) a newly constituted Global Engagement Directorate in the NSC. These bureaucratic developments, more than any other, show both the change in perspective on Islam from a clash to a dialogue paradigm between the Bush and Obama administrations, while also revealing how civilisational imaginaries would continue to materially shape and structure American foreign policy practices and its institutions.

Farah Pandith, an American of Pakistani origin, was appointed as the first ever US Special Representative to Muslim Communities in 2009. Pandith had worked in the NSC under Elliott Abrams during the Bush years, between 2004–7, and in the Muslim World Outreach Policy Coordination Committee. Now she would explicitly lead the State Department's efforts to '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 [that is, pro-American] leaders'.<sup>114</sup> Under her watch, American embassies have been increasingly tasked with hosting *iftar* dinners and actively connecting with Muslim leaders and communities worldwide. She has travelled widely to countries with significant Muslim populations, meeting and launching a broad range of grass-roots initiatives and exchange programmes targeting youth, women, entrepreneurs, faith leaders, students, activists, bloggers, NGOs, and foundations identified for their apparent *Muslimness*.

Along with appointing what can be considered a historically unprecedented US representative to Muslim *people*, President Obama also continued Bush's policy of selecting an envoy to self-styled Muslim *countries*. In a video message delivered during the 2010 Brookings-sponsored 'US-Islamic World Forum' in Doha, Obama announced the appointment of Rashad Hussain, described as a *hafiz* of the Quran,<sup>115</sup> as Special Envoy to the OIC.<sup>116</sup> At the time, Hussain was one of Obama's closest advisers informing the president's Cairo address and the administration's Muslim engagement strategy.<sup>117</sup> As Special Envoy, Hussain was tasked with strengthening business, health, and technology partnerships with the OIC and Muslim-majority countries. He has also not shied away from publicly calling on Islamic religious leaders to theologically denounce terrorism and violence.<sup>118</sup>

<sup>114</sup> {<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/155334.pdf>} accessed 20 October 2013.

<sup>115</sup> Meaning someone who has memorised the Quran.

<sup>116</sup> {<http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2010/02/13/president-obama-addresses-us-islamic-world-forum>} accessed 20 October 2013.

<sup>117</sup> See Andrea Elliott, 'White House quietly courts Muslims in U.S.', *The New York Times*, available at: {<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/19/us/politics/19muslim.html?pagewanted=all&r=1&>} accessed 20 October 2013.

<sup>118</sup> {<http://www.state.gov/p/io/142790.htm>} accessed 20 October 2013.

A Global Engagement Directorate was created in the NSC, in May 2009, to coordinate public diplomacy and other government-to-people activities across the executive. Much of the directorate's responsibilities have been dedicated to overseeing the Muslim engagement agenda.<sup>119</sup> Under the watch of Pradeep Ramamurthy, a Washington intelligence and policy insider, the Directorate launched and expanded multimillion science and business initiatives addressed largely to Muslim-majority countries.<sup>120</sup> Ramamurthy would travel to states such as Indonesia, understood by the administration as constitutive of the Muslim world, to meet with government officials, and civil society groups, to 'address' – as a diplomatic cable at the time framed it – 'concerns and misperceptions about American attitudes towards Islam and Islam in America'.<sup>121</sup>

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 CVE concept is part of Obama's strategy to de-emphasise, both in terms of discourse and practice, the notion of a global war of ideas against an undistinguished Islamist ideology. Here, as Marc Lynch has argued, the Obama administration would build upon 'the initiatives of the last years of the Bush administration to empower, support and amplify credible voices inside the Muslim world [that is, religious leaders and scholars] speaking out against extremists efforts'.<sup>122</sup> CVE's activities would now focus mostly on delegitimising local and context specific Islamist discourses and anti-American narratives, rather than just on *Al-Qaeda's* global discourse.

In 2011, Quintan Wiktorowicz, an expert in Islamist movements and radicalisation, would replace Ramamurthy as 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 to Islamist movements and counter radicalisation activities. Yet it did not shift the focus of the directorate away from policies designed primarily to address Muslim world matters.

Overall, important changes as well as continuities have marked the Bush and Obama presidencies. In terms of changes, Obama largely rejected the neoconservative perspective of Bad Muslims-Good Muslims of the previous administration. In doing so, the Obama administration partly restructured America's foreign policy along the lines suggested by expert voices articulating a Good Islam-Bad Terrorist view – such as those of the 'Changing Course' report and the Brookings' 'Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World'. As Obama sought to reach out and engage peoples and countries identified for their supposed *Muslimness*, while marginalising and defeating the few extremists among them, experts promoting and subscribing to this discourse (such as Dalia Mogahed, Eboo Patel, Rashad Hussain, and Quintan Wiktorowicz) were brought from the outside, through the revolving door mechanism, to fill key policymaking positions.

<sup>119</sup> Lynch, 'Rhetoric and reality', p. 19.

<sup>120</sup> {<http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2010/03/05/introducing-rashad-hussain>} accessed 20 October 2013.

<sup>121</sup> {<http://wikileaks.org/cable/2010/02/10JAKARTA159.html>} accessed 20 October 2013.

<sup>122</sup> Lynch, 'Rhetoric and reality', p. 20.

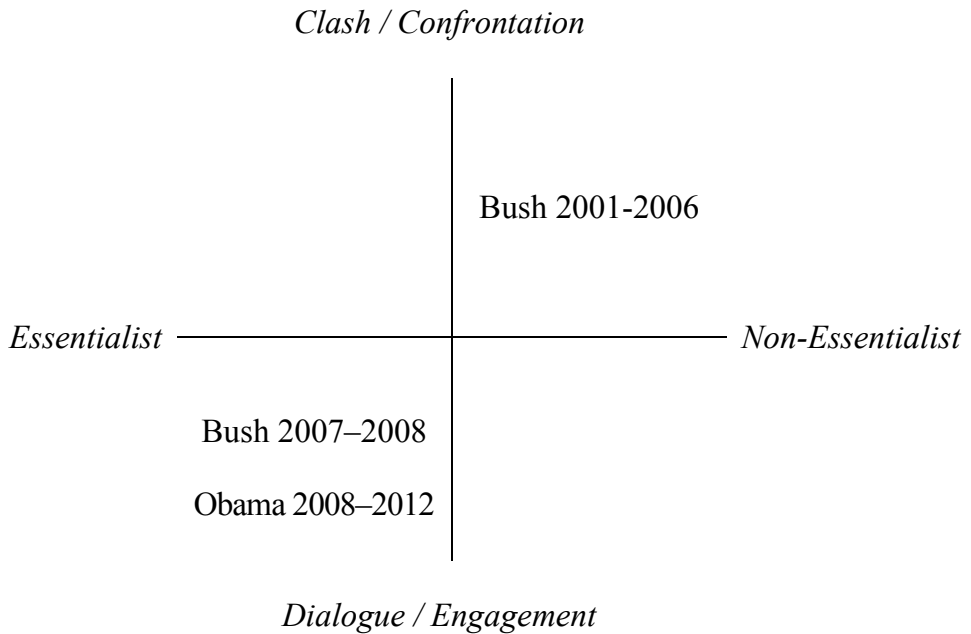


Figure 3. *Presidents' civilisational foreign policy after 9/11*

In parallel, continuities are detectable. As this article has attempted to show, the Obama administration, similarly to the Bush one, would also produce and reproduce civilisational categories and identities through its foreign policy.<sup>123</sup> By seeking to reach out to Islam and Muslims, through symbolic speeches and policy initiatives, Obama has remained within the confines of a civilisational perspective on international politics (see Graph 3). In the process, in fact, he has built upon and expanded the infrastructure inherited by the previous administration.

This continuity is most evident in the reappointment by Obama of a Special Envoy to the OIC and in the elevation of Farah Pandith, who had worked in Bush's NSC, to Special Representative to Muslim Communities. As Farah Pandith herself has, acknowledged:

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 [that Obama has given] to the issue of engagement with Muslims around the world.<sup>124</sup>

As a result, religio-cultural civilisational categories tied to the concepts of Islam and the Muslim world have become ever more embedded in, and enacted onto the

<sup>123</sup> See also Olivier Roy and Justin Vaisse, 'How to win Islam over', *The New York Times*, available at: {<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/12/21/opinion/21roy.html>} accessed 20 October 2013.

<sup>124</sup> Farah Pandith, 'Plenary Session Roundtable: Perspectives on Muslim Engagement featuring Farah Pandith', US Relations with the Muslim World: One Year After Cairo Conference, Washington, DC 2010, available at: {<http://www.usip.org/events/us-relations-the-muslim-world-one-year-after-cairo>} accessed 20 October 2013.



world by American foreign policy discourses, practices – whether programmes, travel itineraries, or symbolic gestures – and institutions – whether special appointees, coordinating committees, or directorates. In the process, there has been an ever-deepening and widening bureaucratisation of relations between America and individual or collective actors identified as representing and speaking for so-called Muslims. Growing social legitimacy (for example, through rhetorical responses, meetings, and photo opportunities) as well as material resources (through public diplomacy initiatives, exchange programmes, interfaith-dialogues, or economic assistance) have been directed to state and nonstate actors understood by successive US administrations as belonging and sharing a particular religio-culturally defined civilisational identity or space. As civil society actors (whether secular or religious), states, and international organisations, such as the OIC, have been increasingly socially and politically recognised for their *Muslimness*, American foreign policy has contributed to ideationally and materially reify and reproduce civilisational boundaries and identities in international relations.

## Conclusion

Despite great suspicion and hesitation about the concept of civilisations in much IR scholarship, their invocation has become widespread and gained substantial resonance in public discourses worldwide. It appears that participants in world politics, compared to IR scholars, are much less sceptical about the international place and role of civilisations. Indeed, individual and collective agents are increasingly discursively framing their, and others', identities, as well as acting *as if* a plurality of civilisations existed and their relations mattered in international society.

In order to understand and explain the effects of these international processes, this the article engaged with the current post-essentialist turn in civilisational analysis in IR. This literature has emerged over the past decade with the scope of broadening civilisational analysis beyond Samuel Huntington's narrow and essentialist take on civilisational clashes. Post-essentialist civilisational analysis has largely developed along two main theoretical routes. On the one hand, a historical sociological perspective that, like Huntington, approaches civilisations as objective entities, but, unlike the late Harvard professor, understands them as internally plural complexes or relations that are more likely to interact with each other through peaceful encounters and exchanges rather than clashes. On the other hand, there is a second well-established critical-reflexive approach that largely stresses the subjective and, above all, the *political* nature of civilisational invocations.

The article sought to carve out more explicitly and develop a *via media*, between the above two approaches, rooted in a participant perspective, an analytical-explanatory approach to theory, and a constructivist methodology. This was labelled a constructivist civilisational politics perspective. While focused on recovering subjective understandings of civilisational identities and boundaries, this approach also investigates how civilisational imaginaries can become objectified in international politics through agents' social action, by being embedded in practices and institutions, and through processes of recognition.

This approach was then applied to explain why and how American foreign policy rhetoric, practices, and institutions have become partly<sup>125</sup> reorganised around different expert civilisational discourses about Islam and Muslims since 9/11. As these changes occurred, social recognition and material resources have been increasingly directed towards certain actors – whether *Al-Qaeda*, the OIC, Indonesia, or youth organisations in the Middle East – singularly identified with their religious identity as Muslim, their supposed shared beliefs in Islam, and their belonging to the so-called Muslim world. These processes are theoretically relevant because they highlight how American foreign policy is contributing to reefing and instantiating the Muslim world as a civilisational social fact in international society.

In terms of empirical payoffs, a constructivist civilisational politics approach has generated some *nuanced* and *counter-intuitive* insights about American foreign policy. Abundant critical-reflexive literature exists on how American perceptions of Islam – throughout history and particularly during the Bush administration – have been overwhelmingly marked by orientalist tropes essentialising a Muslim ‘other’ as incompatible with, and hostile to, Western/liberal values and civilisation. This article shed a nuanced light on an under-investigated and powerful discourse among American international affairs experts that, while objectifying, does not see Islam or most Muslims as antagonistic to the United States. This is a tradition that advocates for greater dialogue, understanding, and engagement between America and an imagined Muslim world. The place and influence of this civilisational line of thinking has been underexplored, and its effects on American foreign policy – especially under the Obama administration – overlooked in the literature.

Finally, the constructivist approach adopted here also contributed to shedding greater light on the distinction between essentialisers and non-essentialisers of civilisations, in general, and of Islam and the Muslim world, in particular. This has produced a rather counterintuitive finding. The Obama administration’s so-called Muslim engagement policy framework, although stressing the virtues of dialogue, appears rooted in a more essentialised Good Islam-Bad Terrorists view of the Muslim ‘other’ compared to the Bad Muslims-Good Muslims confrontationist, but also less essentialist, view that underpinned the Bush administration’s war of ideas framework.

<sup>125</sup> This article does not claim that all American debates about how to respond to 9/11 were framed along civilisational lines. Nor that the entirety of America’s response to the attacks of 9/11 and its Middle Eastern foreign policy have been influenced by civilisational-in-the-plural discourses. What has been shown, hopefully successfully, is that that these discourses have become an authoritative source of American foreign policy thinking and practice following the events of 9/11.