

## The Muslim World as Seen from Atop the Burj Khalifa Tower

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What better vantage point to view the chaos convulsing the Muslim world than from atop the tallest building in the world, the Burj Khalifa Tower in Dubai.

The 163-story tall skyscraper stands in the very center of the Muslim world, almost equidistant between Morocco and Indonesia and the Republic of Kazan in Russia and Empire of Sokoto in Nigeria. For my annual January academic vacation, I decided to settle into the glistening desert city of Dubai and take a Muslim view of the world as

Muslims must see it.

As I glanced in all directions from atop the tower, I became acutely aware of Samuel P. Huntington's argument in his paradigm-shattering book, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (1996). He argued that the nation-state system that has dominated the world since the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 was rapidly ending. Nine vast religion-based civilizations will dominate the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The Confucian, Hindu, Orthodox Christian, Western Christian, and Buddhist civilizations were rapidly reclaiming their former greatness, with Latin America, sub-Saharan Africa, and Japan still finding their ways.



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The Muslim world, on the other hand, which has no natural boundaries and abuts many of the other emerging civilizations, is convulsed with revolutions, foreign invasions, terrorism, and occupations. It is still struggling to throw off centuries of French, British, Russian, Chinese, and most recently, American colonial rule or influence, amid clashing visions of what form a restored Islamic civilization will take.

But my view of the Muslim world from the Burj Khalifa convinced me Muslims are intent on restoring their lost political and religious unity under the rule of a caliph that the Prophet Mohammed founded.

Huntington recognized that the emerging global actors of the 21st century will be 1) civilizations, and 2) they will be fueled by religious passion. The Hindu-based Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is propelling the rise of India, Confucianism inspires the rise of China, evangelical Christianity drives the revival of Western Civilization, and militant Islam fuels the Muslim quest to become a major world power. India has even gone so far as to erect statues and temples dedicated to Bharat Mata, the Mother India Goddess, which I pondered during a recent visit to India.

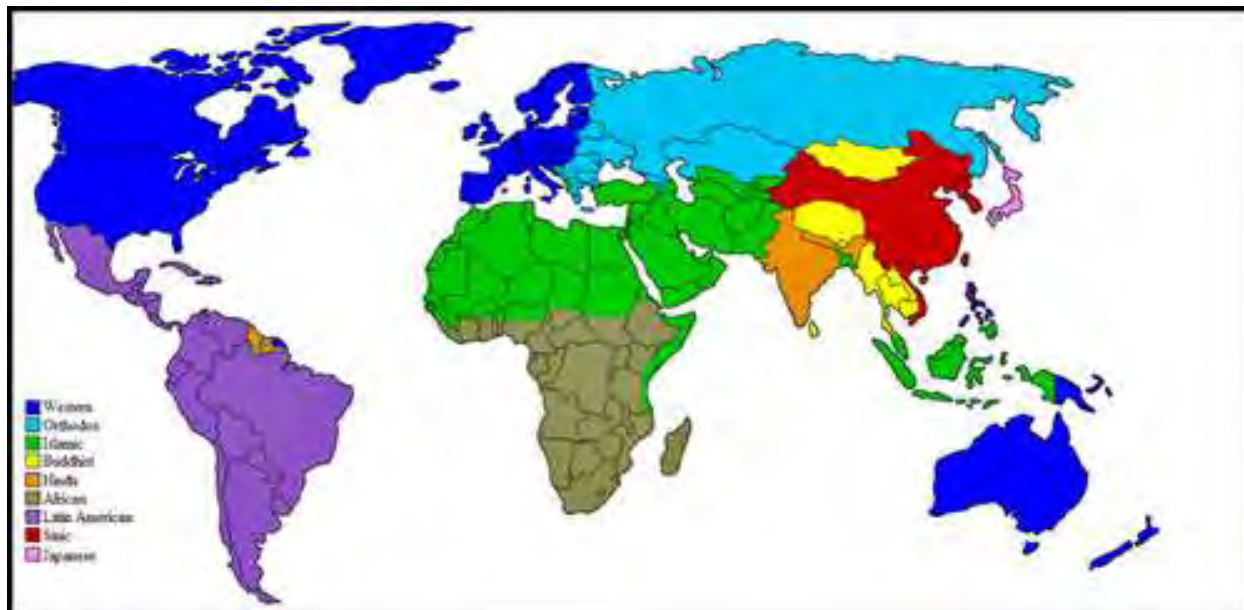
Although a Harvard political scientist, professor Huntington recognized that the determining characteristic of 21st century religions will be their this-worldly orientation. No longer willing to wait for heavenly bliss after death, contemporary religions have embarked on establishing paradise on earth.

Evangelical Christians, BJP Hindus, Zionist Jews, Confucian Chinese, and political Islam are all dedicated to constructing heaven here and now. Zionist Jews describe West Bank settlements as "redeemed" lands. Evangelical Christians firmly believe the USA is "One Nation Under God." Vladimir Putin is convinced Mother Russia is the chosen instrument of God in preserving the true faith. The Chinese Communist regime is convinced they are restoring the perfect society as prescribed by Confucius.

The Koran likewise prescribes almost every aspect of daily life from the times of daily prayer to the rule of the caliph, from which foods are permitted and which taboo, from how to do banking to the use of Arabic in worship, and from the obligation of pilgrimage to how to trim a man's beard. Central to Islam is the unity of all Muslims as one nation, the *umma*, and the rule by the caliph.

As I walked around the observation deck of the tower, I contemplated the state of the Muslim world in each of the four directions. In the west, the ruins of George W. Bush's 2003 invasion of Iraq were still burning, and Americans, Russians, and a host of foreign-sponsored militias bombed Syria daily. What the Muslim world refers to as the "Crusader" alliance of American and European troops had just defeated the most recent attempt to erase the hated French- and British-imposed boundary line between Syria and Iraq, expel non-Islamic cultural influences, and restore the caliphate. ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and the

Levant), in spite of its barbarism, was nonetheless much admired and remained an inspiring vision for many Muslims I met. James J. Zogby, the well-known American pollster, had just published an article in the *Gulf News* (Jan. 1, 2018, p. A2) stating the majority of Muslims he polled agreed with the goals of ISIS to unite the Muslim world and restore the caliphate but disapproved of their violent tactics.



*Huntington's map of the nine civilizations destined to dominate the 21st century.*

For five years, a caliph had again ruled for the first time since Turkey and Britain abolished the Ottoman Caliphate in 1924. To many Muslims, ISIS had erased the hated British- and French-imposed artificial border between Iraq and Syria. In Dubai, people constantly insisted to me (in private) that ISIS brutality was no less bloodthirsty than that of the Americans in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Israelis in Palestine, the Russians in Chechnya, the Chinese in Eastern Turkistan, or the Filipinos in Mindanao. For one brief moment for some Muslims, the dream of a united Islamic *umma* had become a reality and a caliph had again ruled.

Even further west the Israelis, with firm American support, continue to expand Jewish settlements in the West Bank and expel Palestinians from East Jerusalem while some six million displaced Palestinian Muslims remain in refugee camps in Jordan. In December, President Trump recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and stated he would move the American embassy to the city, something no other nation had done since 1967. In the eyes of Muslims, the 50-year Israeli occupation of Jerusalem, Islam's third holiest city, remains a major crime against the Muslim world.

Even further west, British- and French-established and American-supported states and regimes spread from Egypt to Morocco and deep into Senegal and Nigeria. They help keep corrupt monarchs, presidents and dictators in power, and most recently, supported continued military-backed rule of nearly 100 million Egyptians.

Finally, in the far west lies the land of the so-called "Great Satan" itself, the United States, where, according to the Muslim press, followers of Islam are persecuted and can even be killed because of their religion. In Muslim eyes, statements by some American politicians and religious leaders, as well as hate groups (exemplified by the violence last year in Charlottesville), call for the end of Muslim immigration, even the expulsion of Muslims, and support what they characterize as the many "Crusader" wars the U.S. has waged worldwide. President George W. Bush, so many reminded me in Dubai, had intentionally called his wars against Afghanistan and Iraq a "crusade" with all the Christian holy war and theological meaning. President Trump is seen by them as the proud heir of this American anti-Islamic crusade.

Muslims repeatedly reminded me that not only did the American "Crusaders" murder Osama bin Laden but deliberately desecrated his body by throwing it into the sea. Like Jews, Muslims do not accept the Christian practice of burial at sea. Jews and Muslims are peoples of the desert, not the open seas. Although the U.S. Navy claimed that traditional procedures for Islamic burial were followed, no Muslim scholar or clergyman would condone such an offense.

Turning to the north, another view of the Islamic world appears. Just across the Persian Gulf, the Islamic Republic of Iran is locked in a bitter battle against an unholy coalition of Saudi Arabia, Israel and the U.S. Iran is seen as a regime that restored the Islamic unity of church and state, and established a strong state that has the resources and conviction to resist Western domination and sanctions. Most Muslims I met were convinced the schism between Iranian Shiites and Arab Sunnis, though real, was being exploited and aggravated by outsiders.

In the far north, Putin's Russian Empire has no intention of liberating the ten million Muslims in Tatarstan

and the Caucasus. Freed from Soviet domination, the almost 100 million Muslims of Central Asia remain shattered into six "republics," all firmly under Soviet-era nominally-Muslim dictators. In the eyes of most Muslims I met, Russia is an equal participant in the American-led crusade against Islam.



*The author at the Burj Khalifa Tower in Dubai*

The press in the Muslim world constantly reports on the persecution of Muslims in Russia as well as in Western Europe and the USA where anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim sentiment is growing. Every mosque bombed, Muslim raped, attacked or killed is reported in detail and memorial services held with the same solemnity as those held for Westerners killed in their anti-Islamic wars. Like the American press that reports in detail every victim of Islamic terrorism, the press in the Muslim world reports every Muslim killed by Americans, Europeans and Israelis with pictures of the memorial ceremonies and interviews with their families and survivors. "Not one person who water-boarded, raped, tortured, or murdered Muslims

in Abu Ghraib or Guantanamo (prisons) has been shot for war crimes" I repeatedly read in the press and heard from people. "You don't even use the word 'torture'" I so often heard. "You just call it abuse."

As I turned to the south, an equally sad view appears. A corrupt absolute monarchy rules some 35 million Saudis. From an all-time high of 100,000 troops in Saudi Arabia alone, the U.S. military continues to help maintain the monarchies and dictators of the Middle East in power. Saudi Arabia currently leads a coalition waging wars in Yemen and Somalia. Muslims do not fail to remind Americans that the current Saudi regime is so unstable and weak that it has to rely on infidel American Christian and Jewish soldiers to protect the sacred cities of Mecca and Medina.

Turning to the east, an equally dire vision of the Islamic world came into view. Afghanistan continues to remain a war zone between the USA and Muslims from across the Islamic world, and Pakistan is an economic basket case trying to balance American economic handouts with the rise of its Muslim identity. In India, the BJP, the Hindu nationalist party, is intent on erasing its secular history and imposing a militant Hindu policy on the country's 200 million Muslims. The Muslim Rohingya, who have fled Buddhist Myanmar, the Muslim Pattanis of Thailand, and Mindanao Muslims of the Philippines are seen as all persecuted, allegedly with American aid. The Chinese government views its 20 million Muslims as hostile and is brutally turning the 11 million Uyghurs in Xinjiang Province into a minority through massive Han Chinese immigration.

Standing atop the Burj Khalifa Tower, I was struck by the power of the vision of the lost paradise that had existed under the Prophet Mohammed and the early caliphs. The Muslim world does not intend to remain a carved-up carcass of a once-glorious empire. The destruction of ISIS, the killing of bin Laden, and ongoing "War on Terror" aside, the vision of a united Islamic world ruled by a restored caliph remains powerful in the Islamic world. Muslims will not stand aside as China, India, and Russia restore their greatness, Europe struggles to unite, and the USA forges ahead in its quest to "make America great again."

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