

The Tolerance, “Clash of Civilizations” and the Western Values

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Murat Kurnaz, German National with Turkish roots was caught in Pakistan delivered to the US authorities and accused with terrorism. He was taken and detained in the United States detention camp at Guantánamo, Cuba, for almost five years. Kurnaz was found **not-guilty** and released 24 August 2006 from the detention camp and returned to Germany and now processing against the German State for his mistreatment and not letting him to return to Germany although US authorities applied to German government to deliver him several times. It is obvious, that his strong Islamist ties have been “the” reason why the German Government denied taking over Kurnaz in spite of several requests by the US Government.

It seems that the western world still suffer under the serious debate, which was started with Samuel Huntington’s article with his thesis of the „Clash of Civilizations“¹ in summer of 1993 in the “Foreign Affairs” journal².

In his thesis Huntington confines the cultures in strict compartments forgetting the transculturality of millenniums and ruins the structure of the “active tolerance” which has been built over centuries especially starting with the Age of Enlightenment. He bends the historical truth by saying: *“The Conflict along the fault line between Western and Islamic civilizations has been going on for 1300 years.”*³

Mr. Huntington forgets that both the First and the Second World Wars were European civil wars with the battlefields extensively scattered beyond the limits of Europe.

Aren’t we interested at all to bridge that already existing unbridgeable gap and principal animosity preached by Huntington between “us and them”?⁴

At the moment the European and especially the German Society which are massively influenced by the French President Sarkozy and German Minister Schäuble seem to follow Mr. Huntington’s argumentation of “the Moslems or the Chinese are different than us therefore they are dangerous”. The “Chinese Toys” with dangerous paint coatings brought to hysteria in the public by both the German Government and the media. It is sad to observe this in the land of **Gotthold Ephraim Lessing** with his “**Nathan the Wise**” with the “Ringparabel”.

We have to learn to compare Islam with Christianity but not with the modern Western World. The Islamists should also know that since the “happy Days” of Islam⁵ the politics were kept separated from the religion⁶. So why to mix them now?

The West should finally understand that the Islamic fundamentalism is not a descendent of the early ages of Islam but a phenomenon of the modern ages. It was born as a strategy to

¹ Samuel P. Huntington, The Clash of Civilizations?, in: Foreign Affairs, Vol. 72, No. 3, Summer 1993, p. 22

² In page 45 Mr. Huntington says: *“It is my hypothesis that the fundamental source of conflict in this new world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural. Nation states will remain the most powerful actors in world affairs, but the principal conflicts of global politics will occur between nations and groups of different civilizations. The clash of civilizations will be the battle lines of the future.”*

³ Samuel P. Huntington, The Clash of Civilizations?, in: Foreign Affairs, Vol. 72, No. 3, Summer 1993, p. 34/35

⁴ *“to limit the expansion of the military strength of Confucian and Islamic states; to moderate the reduction of Western military capabilities and maintain military superiority in East and Southwest Asia; to exploit differences and conflicts among Confucian and Islamic states; to support in other civilizations groups sympathetic to Western values and interests;”*. Samuel P. Huntington, The Clash of Civilizations?, in: Foreign Affairs, Vol. 72, No. 3, Summer 1993, p. 49

⁵ The era of Mohammed and the four Caliphs

⁶ palästinensischen Wissenschaftler Azmi Bishara, Religion und Politik im Nahen und Mittleren Osten, in: Jochen Hippler/Andrea Lueg (Hrsg.), Feindbild Islam, Hamburg 1993, S. 92 - 141

modernize the near eastern world and never forget that the Islamists are the enemies of a peaceful Islam. Also the Islamists do not belong to the marginal groups of the slums but are from the midst of the well educated middle classes all over the world.

It is necessary for the western world to follow a consistent policy of “active tolerance” strongly holding to the human rights and democracy. Not the profit but the “human rights, democracy and the justice” should be our only guidance in our relations with so called anti democratic countries and regimes.

I will close with **Prof. Bernhard Lewis**:

The Islamic tradition, in theory and, until the onset of modernization, to a large degree in practice, emphatically rejects despotic and arbitrary government. Living under justice is the nearest approach to what we would call freedom.

But the idea of freedom in its Western interpretation is making headway. It is becoming more and more understood, more and more appreciated and more and more desired. It is perhaps in the long run our best hope, perhaps even our only hope, of surviving this developing struggle.”⁷

Thank you very much.

⁷ Excerpt from the speech by Prof. Bernhard Lewis before the AEI in Washington DC. The whole text is a must to understand the islamic world and available on the AEI website at
<<http://www.aei.org/publications/pubID.25815/publication.asp>>