

# The Great Friedman- Huntington *Debate*

BY ROBERT W. MERRY

*The coming clash  
between two  
fundamentally  
opposed post-9/11  
global views.*

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**I**n 1910, a starry-eyed British economist named Norman Angell published a book called *The Great Illusion*, positing the notion that war among industrial nations had become essentially obsolete. It was an instant smash, translated into eleven languages and stirring something of a cult following throughout Europe. "By impressive examples and incontrovertible argument," wrote Barbara Tuchman in her narrative history, *The Guns of August*, "Angell showed that in the present financial and economic interdependence of nations, the victor would suffer equally with the vanquished; therefore war had become unprofitable; therefore no nation would be so foolish as to start one."

At major universities throughout Britain, study groups of Angell acolytes sprang up. Viscount Esher, friend and confidant of the king, traveled far and wide to spread the gospel that "new economic factors clearly prove the inanity of aggressive wars." Such wars, he suggested, would generate "commercial disaster, financial ruin and

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Bruce Thayer, *Face-Off*, 1999, collograph with dry point, 25 inches by 30 inches, Sonia Zaks Gallery, Chicago.

individual suffering” on such a scale that the very thought of them would unleash powerful “restraining influences.” As he told one audience of military men, the interlacing of nations had rendered war “every day more difficult and improbable.”

In recounting all this, Tuchman barely conceals her contempt for Angell and Esher, which seems understandable given

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the carnage unleashed upon the European continent just four years after Angell’s aptly named volume began its massive flow through bookstores. Of course Tuchman was writing with history at her back, while Angell was peering into the future. But, for anyone whose consciousness contained even a hint of realism, it wouldn’t have required subsequent events to demonstrate the flaws of the Angell thesis. His dreamy vision of the future could prove out only if the laws of history were repealed. And the laws of history are immutable.

In our own time, the end of the Cold War has spawned numerous efforts to predict the future shape of the world. In the wake of September 11 and the so-called war on terrorism that followed, a question seems apt: Which of these efforts encompass a realistic view of history?

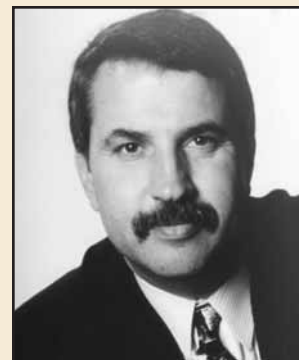
First out of the box was an academic named Francis Fukuyama, who wrote an influential 1989 essay provocatively entitled “The End of History.” He argued that the Cold War’s outcome would usher in an unprecedented era in which major global conflict would disappear. That’s because, he wrote, we will have reached “the end point of mankind’s ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government.” In other words, the Cold War wasn’t simply an epic ideological and geopolitical struggle of the 20th century, but rather the culminating struggle of all

human history. And now that the West has triumphed, war will become—dare I use the word?—obsolete.

Fukuyama’s thesis, even with its parody-like title, created a remarkable stir among American intellectuals. The editor of the *Washington Post*’s “Outlook” section touted it prominently. Around the same time, Harvard president Derek Bok vetoed the appointment of a professor of security studies on the ground that the Cold War’s end had obviated the need for such scholarship. “Hallelujah!” he declared. “We study war no more because war is no more.”

Fukuyama’s “End of History” concept has waned as an intellectual force. But its seeds have sprouted into a very sturdy tree of intellectual thinking. Called “globalization,” it has a brilliant popularizer in the person of Thomas L. Friedman, the *New York Times*’ foreign affairs columnist. He is a three-time Pulitzer Prize winner. His books are automatic best-sellers, including his 1999 treatise on globalization, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*. This book, reflecting a more nuanced and realistic view of the world than Fukuyama’s, argues that the integration of capital, technology, and information across national borders is creating a powerful global market that is driving the world toward a political and cultural convergence. This convergence entails the inexorable spread of free-market capitalism, the only economic system that can work in the new era of global integration. It also entails a concomitant spread of Western democratic liberalism, the only political system in which free-market capitalism can thrive. And thus do friends and enemies of old become mere competitors, and peace emerges as a natural global reality. But of course this peaceful world system must be maintained and balanced, and that’s the job for America, the benign hegemon.

Like Fukuyama’s argument, Friedman’s globalization thesis essentially rests upon what political scientists call the “harmony of interest” theory of conflict, which argues that a conflict-



**Thomas L. Friedman** of the *New York Times*: Fukuyama’s “End of History” concept has waned as an intellectual force. But its seeds have sprouted into a very sturdy tree of intellectual thinking. Called “globalization,” it has a brilliant popularizer in the person of Friedman. Friedman’s globalization thesis essentially rests upon what political scientists call the “harmony of interest” theory of conflict, which argues that a conflict-less world is possible if the right international system can be crafted.

—R. Merry



Harvard's **Samuel P. Huntington**: He argues that the 21st century will be shaped not by ideology or big-power maneuverings but by the immutable force of culture.

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less world is possible if the right international system can be crafted. The two outlooks converge in the idea that the West's Cold War victory and America's emergence as the preeminent nation established a kind of societal paradigm that will serve as guide and beacon for the rest of the world. As other nations and peoples embrace this paradigm, that conflict-less world will emerge.

Standing antipodal to the harmony of interest thesis is the "realist" notion that conflict is inevitable because it is rooted in the essence of human nature. Today's leading realist is Harvard Professor Samuel P. Huntington, who kicked up a ruckus with his 1993 *Foreign Affairs* article, "The Clash of Civilizations?"—later expanded into a book, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*.

Huntington argued that the 21st century will be shaped not by ideology or big-power maneuverings but by the immutable force of culture. "Peoples and countries with similar cultures are coming together," he wrote. "Peoples and countries with different cultures are coming apart.... Political boundaries increasingly are redrawn to coincide with cultural ones: ethnic, religious, and civilizational." What's more, civilizational clashes—which essentially are "tribal conflicts on a global scale"—are likely to be highly intense and very bloody.

Debunking the idea that American values serve as beacons for peoples from non-Western countries, he wrote in a 1999 article that the elites of most nations regard America "as a menace to their integrity, autonomy, prosperity and freedom of action. They view the United States as intrusive, interventionist, exploitative, unilateralist, hegemonic, hypocritical, and...engaging

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in what they label 'financial imperialism' and 'intellectual colonialism'..." In a conversation some years back, he left no doubt that he pretty much agreed with that assessment.

After 9/11, Huntington fell silent, allowing his thesis to speak for itself. For many it has spoken for itself quite forcefully in the unfolding drama of world events since the professor first propounded his Clash concept: the bitter cultural struggles of the Balkans and the Middle East; the Russian war in Chechnya; the Indo-Pakistani stand-off; the ethnic bloodbaths in Africa; the increasingly intense and widespread hostility toward America by Islamic fundamentalists, manifest in multiple "terrorist" attacks culminating in the September 11 conflagrations. It would seem that Huntington's thesis isn't easy to dismiss out of hand.

But Friedman, who largely did dismiss Huntington in *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, continued to do so after September 11. In a column published the week of the attacks, he approvingly quoted Israeli foreign minister Shimon Peres as declaring, "This is not a clash of civilizations." He drew a distinction between god-worshipping Muslims and the real enemy, whom he identified as people who pray to "the God of Hate." That poses questions: While we know there is plenty of hate in the world, does anyone really worship hate? And is this a characterization with a basis in history?

Huntington takes a more philosophical and perhaps a more historical view. He quotes from Michael Dibdin's novel, *Dead Lagoon*, in which a nationalist demagogue says, "There can be no true friends without true enemies. Unless we hate what we are not, we cannot love what we are." Huntington adds, "The unfortunate truth in these old truths cannot be ignored by statesmen and scholars." Elsewhere he writes. "Some Westerners...have argued that the West does not have problems with Islam but only with violent Islamist extremists. Fourteen hundred years of history demonstrate otherwise."

Of the two fundamental global views in the post 9/11 era, Friedman's community of interest outlook seems to enjoy the wider currency. And his stature is bolstered by his three Pulitzers. On the other hand, it might be worthy of note that Norman Angell did Friedman one better back in his day. In 1933, he won the Nobel Peace Prize for his earnest agitations on behalf of world peace. Three years before that the king of England gave him a knighthood. And these honors came to him long after the rivers of blood of World War I had exposed the folly of his dreamy attitudinizing in *The Great Illusion*. ♦