

The West, The East, and The Rest

Jan-Erik Lane

Geneva University, Geneva, Switzerland

Realists like e.g. Mearsheimer from University of Chicago see war between states as a game over regional hegemony. The US leading the West blocks the East in the Ukraine and in Israel as well as Taiwan. The major risk for mankind is a third new conflict, namely Taiwan. The suffering from the wars in Ukraine and Palestine is so heavy that we need to unpack the Huntington idea of civilization war.

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Introduction

Mearsheimer's regional hegemon looks upon a part of the globe as its sphere of influence. It upholds a kind of veto on events so that outside states do not interfere. Over the Americas the famous Monroe doctrine did just that, successfully upheld during the Cuban crisis. Regional hegemony in Europe is essentially contested in two world wars. In Potsdam 1945 it was divided between the US and the USSR, but with the dissolution of the Soviet Union the regional hegemony of the US increased in form of NATO. When president Bush attempted to extend NATO into Ukraine and Georgia, Russia responded on the challenge to her diminished regional hegemony. The final outcome was the horrendous war in Ukraine, a still ongoing attrition war.

In the Middle East the fight for regional hegemony is undecided, involving Iran and Saudi Arabia first and foremost but also Turkey and the Gulf states. Israel is a major player in the struggle, unconditionally supported by the US, which fits Zionist ambitions. Finally, the question of regional hegemony in Far Asia is extremely volatile. China certainly had the ambition of a regional hegemon claiming the South China Sea. It is held at bay by the US over the issue of Taiwan. China's hegemony zeal includes the New Silk Road project from Beijing to Ankara that bypasses a lesser regional hegemon, i.e. India. Now, is there a conflict of civilizations behind this struggle among regional hegemon?

Niall Ferguson speaks often on the future of the "West". He warns against the threats of Russia and China as well as Iran. His message is a repetition of S. Huntington's *Clash of Civilisations* (1996), updated with recent events Ukraine and Gaza. At the same time Mearsheimer and Sachs hand down a very different story of the "West", blaming first and foremost US, saying it is much responsible for the present calamities. By the way, what is the "Western" civilization today, its philosophy as it were?

Occidentalism Versus Orientalism

Let me begin with the concept of Occidentalism, supposedly the core of the West. This theme entails also orientalism, namely that the West looks down upon other civilisations—the *rest* (Mearsheimer). The orientalist

discourse has a background in cultural studies with an implicit idea about Muslim beliefs and values. Now, the “Western” civilization may be unpacked as Christianity, capitalism, global warming, and orientalism.

A Christian Civilization?

Leibnitz may have believed that Christianity in combination with a German emperor was the best of all possible worlds, but Christians no longer dominate in the West. The 20th century was the secularisation of Western countries. Thus, e.g. churches have been closed or rebuilt into apartments. Secularisation has diminished the relevance of all forms of Christian belief. Today the research into Christianity and the world religions is a cultural study or science. Thus, in serious history enquiry into the three monotheistic religions, there is no room for *bias*. One has to employ the well-known methods of evidence also when taking on the big questions like:

1. Were the alleged founders of regions beliefs historical persons: Moses, Jesus, and Muhammed?
2. When were the key religious texts composed and by whom?
3. Are the proportions different between types of believers: fanatics or zealots, lukewarm, and hypocrites?

Islam is either accused of fundamentalism (*jihad*) or hypocrisy (just observing the tradition of *FIVE DUTIES*). But no matter what, a substantial portion of the population in Western countries are no longer Christians.

Western Countries?

In civilisation theory, there is no definition of the “West”, as one takes for granted that it includes the US and many of the OECD countries. The “East” stands for mainly Asian countries with Russia. Where to put Latin America or Africa? Religion does not characterize the West-East distinction. How about economics?

Capitalist Exploitation

The West is much richer than the East, when it comes to GDP per capita. The total GDP of China (18 trillion USD 2022) and of India (4 trillion USD 2022) is not far from that of US (25 trillion USD 2022). The average living standard is however much higher in Western states with the exception of the Gulf monarchies and Singapore.

The economic advantages of the West are looked upon by the others mainly as the outcome of colonialism. The narrative is that the gap can be narrowed by states like China, India, and the Gulf, if the rules of the global market game would be fair. The Asian and African countries complain with support often from Latin America that the global market institutions favor the West.

The response to Western economic dominance has been to either turn to another institution or mechanism than the Western market economic system, or to adopt it whole heartedly.

The planned economy was a major attempt to create an alternative to the capitalist economy. Tried in several countries, it failed in the 1980s in Soviet Union and its satellites. Another development model was import substitution, employed in Asia and Latin America. It was abandoned in the 1990s.

On the other hand, the economies like China and India that emulated decentralized capitalism performed much better.

Thus, we are now left with one global economy with a regime for creating a level playing field—the WTO institutions. Communism and socialism belong to the 20th century. Today the economy is either pure capitalism

or the welfare state. In the latter, citizens have access to free or subsidized public services. The oil monarchies also provide free public services.

Environmental Exhaustion

The suspicion of Occidentalism recurs in global environmental policy coordination. West is not only accused of having caused global warming through their oil thirst, but they are also told to take a much greater share of the necessary cuts in CO₂ emissions. It is true that western countries started industrial revolution much earlier including the CO₂ emissions.

Table 1

Top Seven Emitters Total CO₂ in 2022

Country	% of world emissions
China	29
USA	11
India	7.3
Russia	4.8
Brazil	2.4
Indonesia	2.3
Japan	2.2

Yet, the non-western countries argue at the COP meetings that Table 2 is more relevant.

Table 2

CO₂ Emissions per Capita of the Top Emitters

Country	GDP per capita (tonnes)
China	11.0
USA	17.9
India	2.8
Russia	18.0
Brazil	6.0
Indonesia	4.5
Japan	9.4

The drive for cuts in emission of greenhouse gases should be based on Table 2 and not Table 1, according to the non-western counties.

Eastern Polities

As stated, the ongoing wars in the world today have rejuvenated the theme of clash between civilisations, as suggested by Huntington (1996).

Orientalism used to be a big theme in the occidental view of Arabia, Islam, and Turkey. A key person in the development of the Orientalist theme was Montesquieu. He characterized the Oriental society in *Persian Letters* (1730) as male chauvinist (*harem*) as well as fundamentally hierarchical. Moreover, he also coined the expression “Oriental Despotism” when analyzing the first typical polity. Thus, orientalism entailed gender inequality and personal and intellectual unfreedom. It was in his major work *The Spirit of the Laws* (1748) that Montesquieu characterized Eastern civilisations as despotic.

However, Karl Wittfogel (1957) offered an alternative perspective on despotism. Instead of viewing it as a flawed institution, he linked it up with social efficiency. Following Max Weber, Wittfogel (1957) focused the access to clean water in “hydraulic societies” which required centralised government for drinking water and irrigation. A few majestic rivers or lakes called for large scale water management.

Today the East offers fewer democratic regimes than the so-called REST.

Herodotes and Orientalism

The orientalist perspective may be traced to Greek historian Herodotus’s story of the Persian wars, where the barbarians were defeated—a theme given philosophical connotations by Hegel. In his recent book Llewellyn-Jones (2022) argues that the regime of the *Alchaemids* has been interpreted in this light, and unjustly so. I remain unconvinced though due to the presentation of ruling families in this book.

West and East

There is no fixated demarcation line between Western and Eastern countries. Today we have the OECD versus Asia with a few exceptions like Japan and South Korea. More precisely, the US and the EU confront Russia, China, and central Asia. With the invasion of the Ukraine, Russia appears no longer European. The so-called *Shanghai Group* of nations stands against the West in addition to the BRIC nations.

The separation between West and Shanghai + BRIC used to be affluence, but no longer so. The Moslem world enters also the East with the 59 countries in the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) although Turkey is in the NATO.

Especially for the Arab league and Iran, the state of Israel is viewed as originating in orientalism. It is not only a matter of the territory of old Palestine but also the occidental meeting with Islam. There is no Eastern one religion like Christianity in the West.

Around 1900, the Koran was seen as a copy of the Bible. Weber devoted books to Calvinism and the various religions of India and China. He wrote a couple of pages on Islam, “a religion of warriors” (Weber, 1978).

This is surprising, given his interest in religion and politics. Thus, Weber bypassed the idea of Islamic fundamentalism with *ibn Taymiyya* and the rise of *Salafism*. In the 20th century his ideas were reinvented in a violent rejection of occidental hegemony. As a matter of fact, Islam is rich on different interpretations of Islam of various groups with political consequences, in e.g. New York and Gaza.

If Salafism would come to prevail among Muslims, then the occidental world will be challenged at home.

Occidentalism Today

Occidentalism used to entail capitalism and environmental exploitation. Yet, the Western countries have something inherently positive, namely the firm institutionalization of the search for truth and individual freedom. This should now be seen as the core of occidentalism—*Locke’s* political philosophy.

Imperialism?

It cannot be strongly emphasized that the “West” is not synonymous with US foreign policy and its ambition to be a global or *regional hegemon*.

Western political values: *Life, liberty, and property*. Entails no support for the massive US warfare efforts in the Middle East like the invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan or the unconditional support for Israel.

The Ukraine war is the most worrisome for occidentalism as interpreted here. The European powers are much too involved. Even Sweden has relinquished its neutrality and could face retribution from a victorious Russia.

Niall Ferguson argues that the “West” must help the Ukraine to win the war. It is a strange war where the Ukraine puts up the soldiers and a few NATO countries pay. The casualties on both sides are horrendous. Ukraine will lose but the ideas of Western civilization remain just as relevant. Zelenskyj should have negotiated for peace.

Conclusion

The West is no longer the land of the “white man”. Western nations comprise sizeable minorities from other civilizations. And the pressure on immigration is immense. Why? Poverty—of course, but not only. Rule of law and liberty is valued also by immigrants from the “East”. Locke trinity—life, liberty, and property—is the essence of the “West”.

To come back to the realists Mearsheimer, there is a substantial risk for a third war: Taiwan. However, the West except the US has little interest in this gamble. And nuclear war for the sake of Taiwan seems an exaggeration of regional hegemony. The West will not succumb to Deobandi Islam, which is what Ferguson believes. Remember Averroes and the double truth theory against any form of Salafism.

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