

**PASCAL BONIFACE. VERS LA 4 - E GUERRE MONDIALE?
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The book by the well known French scholar and Director of the l'Institut de Relations Internationales et Strategiques (IRIS) in Paris, Pascal Boniface, has been written as an analysis and critical commentary of both the American Neo-Conservative concept of World War IV¹ and Samuel Huntington's theory on the Clash of Civilizations which underlies it.² According to this author, Islamic fundamentalism represents a real threat and during the last few years a menace of the clash of civilizations has unfortunately become more likely. However, in his opinion there is no determinism in history which is made by people's decisions. The Western nations, especially those of them which are the most directly involved such as the US and Israel, can by their policies either aggravate the situation or provide a chance for a brighter future. In his view, which corresponds to the traditional French approach since Charles De Gaulle's time (47-49), the main issue which needs to be addressed in order to prevent further spread of the confrontation is the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the improvement of situation of the Palestinian people. The Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories and its constant repressions of the native population, due to the globalization process and the role of mass media, has become a common cause and a source of a most popular

¹ Norman Podhoretz, "World War IV: How it started, what it means and why we have to win," *Commentary* (September 2004), 56. According to Boniface the concept of WW IV was introduced for the first time by Eliot Cohen in his article in *Commentary* in October 2001. Cohen proposed to abandon the talks on "war on terrorism" by a more precise in his meaning designation of World War IV (Boniface, 99).

anti-Western movement among the hundreds of millions of Muslims all over the world (35). Although the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is limited in terms of its geographical extensions and the number of casualties involved, it is nevertheless becoming a major issue because of its geo-strategic potential; as Boniface writes, “this conflict is located on ground zero of the war between Islam and the West” (28). A growing number of Arabs and Muslims are starting to consider the Western world in general, and the US in particular, as responsible for providing immunity for the Israeli government’s illegal occupation of the Palestinian territories and the repression of the Palestinian population. The introduction of satellite TV stations such as Al-Jazeera has transformed the Palestinian struggle, which had previously been relatively local or at most a regional topic, into a truly global one (35). The conflict has not only had repercussions in the Middle East but all over the Muslim world and even beyond. According to the Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, well-known for his pro-American policy, “the first cause of terrorism is injustice” and the development in Palestine prove that abundantly³ (103). Another major US ally in the struggle against terrorism, Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf, indicated that “the pictures of the killed Palestinians which TV has been showing almost every day have engendered the rejection of America in the Muslim World”⁴ (44). In his view the struggle against terrorism should include not only military but also political means, particularly the resolving of the two major political conflicts which foster extremism among the Muslims: the conflict in Kashmir and the Palestinian-

² Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1996).

³ Mubarak’s statement as quoted by *Le Monde* (April 21, 2004).

⁴ For Musharraf’s statements see “La Conviction de Musharraf,” *Le Nouvel Observateur* (September 30 2004).

Israeli conflict (44-45). When asked which of them is more important and more urgent to be solved, he opted for the latter (45).

Boniface suggests that there is now an almost unanimous consensus, which was accepted in March 2002 by all the Arab States of the region, on how to resolve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict (77). It essentially involves the Israeli withdrawal from all territories occupied since 1967, the establishment of an independent and viable Palestinian state, and a security guarantee for Israel. In Boniface's view, it is mainly the Israeli government's opposition and its American protection that prevents this plan's implementation. As the author shows in the Annexe, between 1967 and 2004 the US used its veto power 39 times to prevent the UN Security Council from condemning Israeli actions (167-172). Although the author admits that the end of the conflict and the establishment of a viable Palestinian state alongside Israel would not automatically resolve the issue of terrorism and could not completely eliminate the possibility of a clash of civilizations, he is still convinced that as the supporters of terrorism in the Islamic World lose their main arguments their chances to win followers are going to diminish (31). Islam as such does not need to be either belligerent or hostile to the West, in fact in the first part of the 20th century, most Muslim political and spiritual leaders were great admirers of the Western values. This admiration of Western values is prevalent even today among the majority of the Islamic peoples (121-122). Referring to Huntington's theory, the author comments on two equally dangerous mistakes: the first is to believe in the inevitability of such a confrontation, which might transform into a self-fulfilling prophecy; and the second is to reject this theory because of political "correctness" (27). In his view it is both possible and necessary to do everything to

avoid a clash of civilizations and the way to accomplish this is not through verbal condemnation but through the creation of suitable political conditions.

This monograph, which is well researched, contains a number of interesting insights concerning the Middle East and the global war on terrorism. However, the author represents the French political mainstream and seems to overestimate the importance and originality of the French policy. France, although it often pretends to “dire droit,” as a middle power often has to adapt to the existing balance of power, and its policy is often shifting in an opportunistic direction.⁵ As one French author noticed, “the French are realists, but they don’t like to admit it.”⁶ One of the leading French experts on the Middle East, Alain Gresh, last year noted “France, regrettably, has renounced its independent stand in favor of Palestinian right and is now orchestrating a wider rapprochement with the US in the Middle East, from Iraq to Afghanistan, reversing its longstanding strategy on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.”⁷ Other European nations are for various reasons even less capable and/or willing to use their influence in order to find their proper solution to the region. The major responsibility however still lies with the US. In spite of all its domestic difficulties, either the present or more likely one of future American administrations will be forced to deal with the Palestinian drama in more efficient ways in order to prevent the escalation of global conflict.

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⁵ Charles Cogan, *French Negotiating Behavior. Dealing with La Grande Nation* (Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2003), 48-52.

⁶ Jean Marie Guehenno as quoted by Cogan op. cit, 52.

⁷ Alain Gresh, “The view changes, the facts remain. Palestine: the forgotten reality,” *Le Monde Diplomatique* (January 2006).

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