

# *Dialogue among Civilizations as a new approach for International Relations*

By: Dr. M.R. Hafeznia  
-Tarbiat Modarres University (TMU) - Tehran  
Dept. of political geography

## **Abstract:**

After the collapse of bipolar system in the world, different views and theories expressed by the scholars and thinkers about the future of the world and international system. One of them is the theory of “ The clash of Civilizations” which expressed in 1993 by the Samuel Huntington, who was the director of J.M.Olin institute for Strategic Studies in Harvard University. This theory caused some anxieties in the world.

In reaction to this theory, M.Khatami, president of the Islamic Republic of Iran, proposed the way of “Dialogue Among Civilizations” as a paradigm in the international relations, and the 53<sup>rd</sup> General Assembly of the United Nations on 3 September 1998 accepted it, and approved a resolution for the purpose of promoting dialogue among cultures and civilizations, and nominated the year 2001 as “the year of Dialogue Among Civilizations”.

This article meantime the study of both mentioned theories, refers to the role of dialogue approach in creation of peaceful relations between nations, and states.

**Keywords:** Dialogue, Civilization, Clash of Civilizations, Dialogue among Civilizations, International Relations.

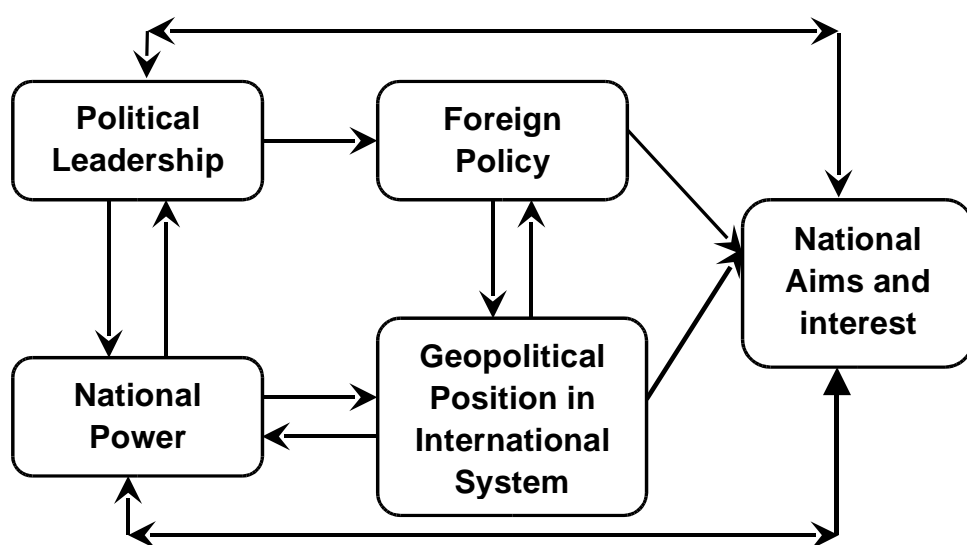
## **Introduction:**

States and countries as the member of international community are enforced to make relations with each other. They have special functions in the world system. The states and governments for their being and strengthening themselves, and also to meet welfare and security for their nations have aims, which named national aims and interests. For achievement to these aims in the international arena, the rational foreign policy is needed. Hans Morgenta, who is the prominent scholar of international relations, says, the true aims of the foreign policy of any country are defense from, and expansion of national interests. (Ranney, A-1993)

Foreign policy of any country is defined on the basis of the constitution, and is performed by the foreign affairs ministry and other related organizations. (Qavam, 1991:77)

The correct understanding of the international situation, and the position of the country in the world system, and also effective diplomatic activities, can enhance the national power and promote the situation of the country in the international system. (Kazemi, 1994:203)

There is a direct relation between the national power, the political leadership, and the geopolitical position of the country in the international system, with the achievement of the successful foreign policy (Hafeznia, 1999:2). These relations can be displayed in this model:



From: M.R.Hafeznia, 1999.

M.Khatami the president of the Islamic republic of Iran, With understanding of international situation, presented his idea of the “Dialogue among Civilizations” in General Assembly of the United Nation in 1998 as a new approach to the international relations. This idea welcomed by the majority of the states and affected on the position of Iran in the world.

**The Background of Dialogue Among Civilizations:**

This idea was formed under the effect of the three factors:

- 1- Reaction to the theory of “The Clash of Civilizations” which was propounded by Samuel Huntington in 1993. Huntington is the professor of the science of government and director of the

John.M.Olin Institute for Strategic Studies at Harvard University. His theory is the product of the Olin Institute's project "The Changing Security Environment and American National Interests". The theory presented in the frame of an article, which published in Foreign Affairs at summer 1993. Huntington expressed his theory as an analytical framework for the future of the world after the Cold War era. His statement in the theory is as under:

"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 human kind 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 dominate global politics. The fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future."(Huntington, 1993:22)

Huntington in the framework of a spatial pattern mentions seven or eight civilizations, which include: Western, Confucian, Japanese, Islamic, Hindu, Slavic-Orthodox, Latin America and possibly African civilization.

He emphasizes that, if do not prevent from the clash between the components of civilizations, the big conflicts between civilization will be occurred, and the most probability struggle will be happened between the Western civilization with a coalition of Islamic and Confucian civilizations.

This theory caused some anxieties in the academic and political centres about the future of the world. From the other hand international changes and transformations after the Cold War enhanced the level of disputes in the world.

On the basis of this situation, M. Khatami propounded his idea of "Dialogue Among Civilizations" as a mechanism for prevention from civilizational conflicts between humankind and as a paradigm for international relations.

- 2- Appearing a new approach in foreign policy of Iran, which took place in the year 1995-1997. The new policy had emphasize on:
  - 2 Détente in relations between Iran with other countries.
  - 3 Making confidence, peace, cooperation and reciprocal respect.
  - 4 Mutual understanding, Dialogue and cultural policy.
- 3- The experiences and personality of president. Khatami:

M. Khatami in his antecedent has been the minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance, and his field is philosophy, so he has a cultural character.

Moreover during in his ministry he has experiences about religion dialogue especially between Islam and Christianity. From another side the theory of dialogue and mutual understanding is basically cultural, that has special language and differs with the language of power, militarism, economic interests and diplomacy of power equilibrium. Therefore Khatami has not been known only a mere statesman, but he is known as a reformist thinker and humanitarian politician.

### **World wide reaction to the Dialogue Among Civilizations:**

Khatami expressed the idea of dialogue among civilizations in his speech to the fifty-third United Nations General Assembly on 21 sep. 1998, and proposed to declare 2001 as the year of dialogue among civilizations. He expressed:

“I would like to propose, in the name of the Islamic Republic of Iran, that the United Nations, as the first step, designate the year 2001 as the “Year of Dialogue Among Civilizations”, with the earnest hope that through such a dialogue the realization of universal justice and liberty be initiated...Establishment and enhancement of civility, whether at national or international level, is contingent upon dialogue among societies and civilizations representing various views, inclinations and approaches. If humanity at the threshold of the new century and millennium devotes all efforts to institutionalize dialogue, replacing hostility and confrontation with discourse and understanding, it would leave an invaluable legacy for the benefit of the future generations.

Similarly, it is necessary that, as members of the United Nations, we revisit the history of the formation of this organization with a view to reform and improve the institution through a rational exchange of views.” (Bekker, T. & Pretorius, J.2001: 18)

This proposal was welcomed and received support by 179 states in the General Assembly (Dehghan, 1999:2) and led to resolution 53/22, which formally adopted.

This resolution welcomes to the collective endeavor of the international community to enhance understanding through constructive dialogue among civilizations on the threshold of the third millennium. The Resolution has four paragraphs.

- 1- Expresses its firm determines to facilitate and promote dialogue among civilizations.

- 2- Decides to proclaim the year 2001 as the United Nations year of Dialogue among Civilizations.
- 3- Invites Governments, The United Nation systems including the UNESCO and other relevant international and non-governmental organizations, to plan and implement appropriate programmes to promote the concept of dialogue among civilization including through organizing conference and seminars and disseminating information and scholarly material on the subject.
- 4- Request the secretary-General to present a provisional report on activities in this regard to the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session, (53<sup>rd</sup> plenary meeting: 4 Nov. 1998)  
After this acceptance, secretary General of the U.N, UNESCO and the government of Iran performed some endeavors for development of this concept by forming the conferences, roundtables, conventions and etc.

Moreover, some political leaders, supported from the idea of president Khatami. For example:

Nelson Mandela (South Africa), Jiang Zemin (China), Mahatir Mohammad (Malaysia), Shevardnadze (Georgia), Bin Ali (Tunisia), Hertsuk (Germany), Banarian (India), President of Italy and Austria, and even Samuel Huntington.

Also some regional and international conferences have been held throughout the world. For example:

- 5 OIC\* Symposium on dialogue among civilization in Tehran from 3-5 May 1999. (Beker & Pretoria.J, 2001:65)
- 6 Seminar on cultural-civilizational relations between Iran and Africa in Tehran (from 1-2 May 2001)
- 7 The conference on religion and dialogue in Harare, The capital of Zimbabwe, in 12 May 2001 (Newsletter of the conference, 2001:5)
- 8 International conference on dialogue of civilizations in Austria with attendance of the president of Austria and the Secretary General of U.N.
- 9 130<sup>th</sup> Sessions of worldwide interassembly in Oman with presence of Mr.Pico as the representative of the secretary General of U.N in dialogue among civilizations. (Gozaresh goftegoo, 2001:26)
- 10 The conference of dialogue among civilizations in Beijing (China) in 12-13 Sep 2001. (Ettelaat, 9 May 2001:2)

Moreover, in present times and after the attack of 11 Sep.2001 to the America (New York and Washington) that sensitively affected on relations of the Islamic and Western civilizations the attention

again turned to the theory of dialogue among civilizations. This event also prepared a new bed to activate Iranian diplomacy and consultation with the governments, to prevent the world from civilizational and cultural conflict.

-11 For example, travel of European delegation to Tehran in 26 Sep.2001 and their talking with Iranian Officials especially president Khatami.

- In this visiting Mr. Luee Michael the head of the European delegation, Chavier Sulana secretary General of foreign policy of

---

\* Organization of Islamic Countries

European Union, Josef Pick the foreign minister of Spain were presented. (Ettelaat, 27 Sep.2001: 2)

-12 Jack Straw the foreign minister of U.K visited from Iran and talked with Iranian officials. (Hayat-e-no, 26 SEP.2001:3)

-13 The president of South Korea (Mr. Kim day Joung) in his meeting with the editors of Asian Mass Media emphasized on the role of civilization dialogue for détente in the world. (Ettelaat, 19 Sep.2001: 16)

-14 Tony Beler the Prime Minister of U.K in a message requested M. Khatami to play an active role for prevention of encounter between religions and civilizations. (Ettelaat, 17 Sep2001:2)

-15 In the period of inflammation of American terrorism events, connection and consultation between president Khatami and U.N Secretary General took place about the expectation of world community from civilizational dialogue, to play the main role for détente in the world.

In general acceptance of world community from the paradigm of dialogue among civilizations, and determination of the year 2001 as the year of dialogue among civilizations, and holding the conference and seminars in the world by the U.N, Governments, Universities, etc...and also trend of anxiety in the world, especially after the events of U.S.A, and the expansion tension between the Jewish and Western states with the Islamic societies and states, have increased the important of Civilizational Dialogue Paradigm in the world, and from the another side has enhanced the geopolitical position of Iran in the international system.

### **The philosophy of Civilizational Dialogue:**

International relations in the world are under the influence of two systems or realities.

1- Formal and legal system. 2- Informal and geopolitical system.

The legal system comes into existence on the basis of reciprocal rights and respect between states. This system is a set of conventions, agreements, pacts, treaties, and international organizations in the scale of regional and global. International organizations are a gathering of countries, which come into existence on the basis of multilateral treaty or agreement for achievement of common aims, and they have a legal personality. (Moghtader, 1995:306)

In this system, states have equal rights and powers on the basis of proclamation of the principles of international law- 1970 (Mousazadeh, 1997:48)

The antecedent of forming the legal system and international organizations in the international relations back to the Wien congress (1815), the Hague conferences (1907,1899) and the economical, technical and social transition in Europe (Clave, 1990:17 & Moghtader, 1995:307). The evolution trend of this process in 20<sup>th</sup> century culminated in forming two international organizations, namely the League of Nations and U.N. (Colliard, 1985:92)

Geopolitical order is a system of relations between states, which is formed on the basis of their geopolitical weight that is the source of national power, and determines the position of any country in hierarchy of the world power. Therefore the quality of international relations is the reflection of the pattern of world wide geopolitical system.

In this system the process of transnational political organizing, takes place on the pivot of the state, which in the global or regional scale is the most powerful.

In this system the powerful state with utilization of visible and invisible tools and instruments, and also penetration and influence, try to lead the regional and global relations in to the direction of its aims and interests.

The two mentioned systems have relation with each other. But the main point is this that the legal system is commonly under the influence of geopolitical system that reflects the power relations. So in formal structures and organizations both regional and global, the powerful members and states usually affect and influence on the process and decisions of them, and partly take their leadership position on the hand. (Hafeznia, 1999:24-26)

The existence of power relations paradigm between the states have caused division of the world, such as first world and third world, developed and under developed, core and periphery, north and south, rich and poor, etc. In other words the creation of injustice space in the

international relations is the product of this paradigm. In this situation the language of the states for talking with each other is not equal.

Since dialogue requires believing to the equality of personality for states and also respect to each other, therefore the dialogue, can create possibility for mutual understanding and achievement to the peace and détente in the relations between nations and states in a peaceful environment.

Another background, which necessitates the civilizational dialogue, is competition and conflict between nations and societies on the basis of identity. This phenomenon, especially after the collapse of bipolar system has grown up in the world.

These competition and conflict on the factors, such as religion, ethnicity, language, place, race, development level, social class and etc... to some extent affected on the forming of clash of civilizations theory.

This is a reality that the struggle and conflict between racial, religious and ethnic groups are in expansion, and humankind has the bitter experiences especially in Africa, south east Europe, south of Asia, Caucasia, Central Asia, south east Asia, and etc....

Recently the racism thoughts have revived in America and Europe, that its evidences are clash between some European racists with Asian families in some cities of England, Germany, France and Netherlands, and more important in aggression and attack to the Muslims and Arab peoples in America and Europe after the 11<sup>th</sup> September of the year 2001.

After the terroristic attack to America in 11 Sep, we can see some expressions and discourses in the language of some Western political leaders such as Bush the president of U.S.A, that referred to the crusade war, and clash between civilizations, or the prime minister of Italy who had told about the superiority of Western civilization against Islamic civilization (Ettelaat, 3 Oct 2001:16). In opposite to such expressions some scholars and political leaders in the Islamic and Arab world came sensitive, and reacted and denied these allegations. For example Ayatollah Khamenai the leader of The Islamic Republic of Iran against the expression's Bush that had said, "Any body who is not with us, is with terrorists" expressed "We are neither with you (U.S.A), nor with terrorists". (Ettelaat, 27 Sep 2001:2)

Certainly the some west and developed countries on the basis of colonization antecedent, power, manifestations of their civilization and technology have racist views, and their looking to the other nations and states is to some extent derogatory and contemptuous.

Edward Said writes: orientalists utilized the contempt of others as the instrument for legitimating of geopolitical strategy by the imperialistic countries, and this manner continues from the past up to the now. (Said, 1998:256-262)

Farmanfarmaian writes: during the past two decades the options of political fighting in the middle east such as the Palestinians, Arabs and Muslim peoples interpreted as the savagery and no having civilization by the west. (Farmanfarmaian, 1998:286-294)

O'Tuathail, who is a geopolitician, in his writings explains the roots of imperialism and seeking superiority of the white than the other races, also he express that Roosevelt the former president of U.S.A like other imperialists was believer to racism and was being preferred the white than the others. (Tuathail, 1998:1-15)

The racist views and looking self-superiority is not being only in the west, but it existed between the other racial and ethnical groups. The sentiment of identity on the basis of one or more factors is in growing. So the control of this trend and regulating of the relations between different groups requires development of culture and literature of dialogue.

The third factor that emphasizes the necessity of dialogue is development of insecurity in daily life of societies. We all of us feeling insecurity. Terrorism with any motive, holy or not holy automatically is dreadful, and usually some innocent people injured. There is a point that classification of terrorism needs a study.

In any case terrorism with utilizing deferent ways and tools culminates to fear, killing, destroying the home, building and properties of the people.

From another side development of terrorism especially in its kind of political has a direct relation with the development of tension between nations and states. Therefore to prevention of insecurity danger on the basis of terror strategy that threatens the security of the societies, to some extent requires the acceptance of logical dialogue way by the states.

Therefore settlement of an international system on the basis of justice and reciprocal respect in the relations of nations, and achievement to the public security in the countries, and also settlement of peace and peaceful coexistence, and cultural and mental interactions between humankind, is related to the acceptance of culture and strategy of Dialogue by the main players in the world such as governments, religions, parties, leaders, social elites, scholars and etc...

### Conclusion:

Samuel Huntington presented the theory of Clash between Civilizations as a paradigm for explanation of the world situation after the cold war in 1993, which caused some anxieties.

In opposite to it, President Khatami as a statesman with cultural personality presented his civilizational dialogue idea as a paradigm for international relations in 53<sup>rd</sup> session of U.N General Assembly. This paradigm welcomed by the General Assembly and nominated the year 2001 as the year of Dialogue among Civilizations.

Also the heads and officials of some countries in the world welcomed to the Idea. From the other hand after the terroristic events in the U.S.A, the expectations of the world community about the role of civilizational dialogue increased.

Continuation of power relations paradigm in the world, which have produced social and geographical inequality between human communities of the world, and development of identity's sentiments and competitions on the basis of religion, race, ethnicity, language, place and etc...(Which help to growth of misunderstanding and tensions between cultural and civilizational groups), and also increasing insecurity arising from multi dimensional terrorism, all of them necessitate the development of Dialogue as a paradigm between nations and cultures. Because this approach in the new world can bring for us peace and Security, and we need peace and security more than any time.

### *References*

- 16Abi Saab, G. (1994). Concept of International Organization. Tehran: Elmi & Farhangi; Pub.
- 17Amiri-Vahid, M. (1996). *The Clash of Civilization*. Tehran: IPIS.
- 18Bekher, T. & Pretorius, J. (2001). Dialogue Among Civilizations- A Paradigm for Peace. Pretoria: UPS.
- 19Colliard, C.A. (1985). *Institutions des Relations Internationales*. Paris: Editions Dalloz.
- 20Dehghan, M. (1999). *Evaluation of the Détente Policy*. Tehran: Ettelaat Newspaper.
- 21Demko, G.J. & Wood, W.B. (1994). Reordering the World. U.S.A: West view Press.
- 22Farmanfarmaian, A. (1998). The Geopolitics Reader (Did you Measure UP...). London: Routledge.

- 23Ettelaat Newspaper, No.22290, 9 Sep.2001. P.16
- 24Ettelaat Newspaper, No.22291, 10 Sep.2001, P.2
- 25Ettelaat Newspaper, No.22297, 17 Sep.2001, P.2
- 26Ettelaat Newspaper, No.22299, 19 Sep.2001, P.16
- 27Ettelaat Newspaper, No.22306, 27 Sep.2001, P.2
- 28Ettelaat Newspaper, No.22310, 3 Oct.2001, P.19
- 29Hafeznia, M.R. (1999). *Optimal Pattern for International System*.  
Daneshvar, 25, 23-30.
- 30Hafeznia, M.R. (1999). *The New Approach to foreign Policy and  
changing the Geopolitical Position of Iran*. Tehran: 10<sup>th</sup> Congress of  
Iranian Geographers- Imam Hussein University.
- 31Hayat no Newspaper, No.385, 26 Sep.2001, P.3
- 32Huntington, S.P. (1993). The Clash of Civilizations. *Foreign Affairs*,  
72(3), 22-50.
- 33Huntington, S.P. (1996). *The Clash of Civilizations and The  
Remaking of World Order*. U.S.A: Simon & Schuster Inc.
- 34Inis, L. & Claude, J. (1986). *The Record of International  
Organizations in the Twentieth Century*. Taipei: Tamkan University.
- 35International Centre for Dialogue among Civilizations. (2001).  
Gozaresh goftego, year.1, No.10, 23 Aug.2001, Tehran: ICDAC.
- 36International Centre for Dialogue among Civilizations. (2001).  
Gozaresh goftego, year.1, No.11, 6 Sep.2001, Tehran: ICDAC.
- 37International Centre for Dialogue among Civilizations. (1998). *Ketab  
Mah*. Tehran: ICDAC.
- 38International Centre for Dialogue among Civilizations. (2001).  
(Report 1). Tehran: ICDAC.
- 39Kazemi, A.A. (1994). *International Relations in Theory and Practice*.  
Tehran: Ghoomes Publishing Co.Ltd.
- 40Moghtader, H. (1995). *Public International Law*. Tehran: The  
Institute for Political and International Studies (IPIS).
- 41Moussazadeh, R. (1997). *Public International Law (Vol.1)*. Tehran:  
(IPIS)
- 42Qavam, A. (1991). *Principles of International and Foreign Policy*.  
Tehran: SAMT.
- 43Ranney, A. (1993). *Governing: An Introduction to Political Science*:  
Prentice Hall.
- 44Report Trip. (1999) – Millennium of Dialogue and Understanding.  
Tehran: Rasaneh Publication.
- 45Said, E. (1998). *The Geopolitics Reader (Orientalism Reconsidered)*.  
London: Routledge.

- 46The Committee on Dialogue. (2001). Newsletter United Nations.  
Year of Dialogue among Civilizations. Harare: U.N
- 47Tuathail, G.O. (1998). The Geopolitics Reader (Introduction)-  
London: Routledge.