

A NEO CONFIDENTIAL

An Interview with Daniel Pipes

By Lynn Wexler-Margolies

Photographs by Steven Wilson



He is both hero and villain, revered and reviled. He presents a guarded calm, while managing an intense gaze and lucid responses. He is complicated, though gracious. Daniel Pipes is one of the world's foremost analysts on the Middle East and Islam. He has been called a neo-conservative, although he has "... not quite figured out what views define a neo-conservative" and whether he is one.

I was privileged to have sat with him for two hours on behalf of DAVID, discussing the threat of radical Islam that, according to

CBS Sunday Morning, "Pipes identified years ahead of the political curve." In 1995 Pipes wrote, "Unnoticed by most Westerners, war has been unilaterally declared on Europe and the United States." The Boston Globe has stated, "If Pipes's admonitions had been heeded, there might never have been a 9/11."

He was a Jew, born and raised in Boston, Mass. His parents emigrated from Poland in the 1940s. His father was a prominent historian at Harvard University. Pipes also attended Harvard and earned a doctorate in medieval Islamic history. Harvard has

recognized Pipes as one of its 100 most influential living graduates. He credits visits to the Sahara and Sinai deserts in the late '60s for arousing his interest in the Arabic language; and visits to Niger and Tunisia for his interest in the Islamic world. After graduating from Harvard in 1971, he spent two years in Cairo, where he learned Arabic and studied the Quran.

Pipes taught at Harvard, Princeton, Chicago, the U.S. Naval War College and Pepperdine. He has held two presidential appointments in the U.S. government, testified before many congressional committees, worked for five presidential campaigns and is founder of the Middle East Forum (MEForum.org). He is the author of 12 books, and his writings have been translated into 33 languages. His website, DanielPipes.org, is among the most accessed sources of specialized information on the Middle East and Islam.

Pipes identifies issues few recognize or acknowledge, then develops projects to address them, such as Campus Watch, Islamist Watch and the Legal Project. He has unabashedly counted among his enemies Edward Kennedy to Edward Said, Lyndon LaRouche to John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt, and Tariq Ramadan to the Council on American-Islamic Relations. He was deemed the neo-conservative movement's leading thinker by Egypt's Al-Ahram newspaper, and publicly invited to convert by a leading al-Qaida figure.

Whether one agrees with his actions and opinions, his expertise on the Middle East and Islam is to be reckoned with, and his integrity admired.

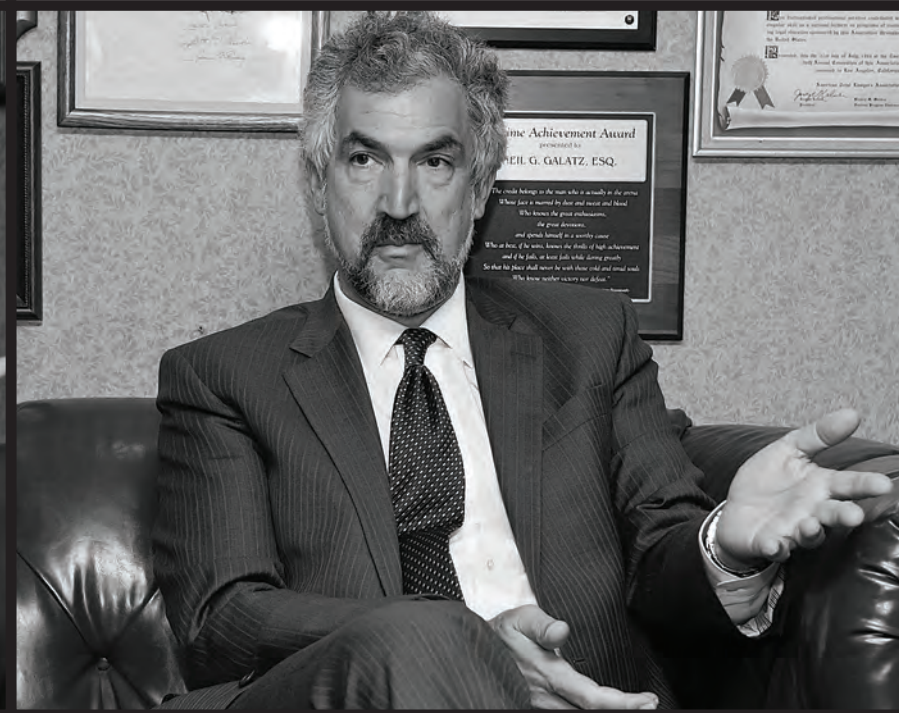
observers from on high. I was one of a very small minority who stood up for what the United States is and what U.S. policy was. As the politics of that time became more revolutionary, I became more inclined to want to preserve what was precious ... the freedoms we enjoy, the order we follow and the premises we base ourselves on. And that is the case today. I like what we have. In that sense, it's simple ... it's like rooting for your home team ... and that's where the truck driver reference comes in. I may have come to it through a more elaborate means, but I end up in the same place ... and so I feel very different from most academics, and have been loathed for my criticism of them.

DAVID: What do you feel was at the heart of that radicalism?

PIPES: I've spent a lot of time thinking about that, and my explanation is a bit theoretical ... but we who grew up in the '50s experienced a rather special time. We were imbued with an idealism. The '60s were more troublesome, and many of my contemporaries became disappointed, disillusioned ... they felt they were misled ... that the United States was a fraud and not what it was cracked up to be ... that it was deficient. I saw it differently, perhaps because I had traveled ... yes, we had problems to be sure ... but we still had it good. So I think the idealism of the '50s, and the subsequent letdown, served as the backdrop for the radicalism of that time.

DAVID: And presently?

PIPES: Well, we're seeing it all over again. Beginning with the 2004 Bush-Kerry presidential elections ... you've got Kerry and Vietnam



DAVID: You're well educated, particularly in Middle East studies. Yet you told Harvard Magazine that you have the politics of a simple truck driver, not the complex ones of an academic. Can you explain?

PIPES: My formative experience politically and philosophically began for me as a teenager. I did a good deal of traveling and in fairly remote places, which gave me an appreciation for this country. I went to school at a time of intense radicalism, the late '60s and early '70s, largely led by artistic types and intellectuals. They tend to view themselves as being not of the masses, but

... Bush and the Texas National Guard controversies ... many radical American intellectuals agree that one of the major obstacles in the 2004 election was democracy. As that sentiment has progressed, alongside an increasingly failing economy, wars overseas ... what you've got are people wanting to occupy Wall Street, and changing the political landscape ... it's the '60s all over again.

DAVID: How does that coincide with the impending threat of global Islamist extremism?

PIPES: The radical left in this country is critical of our existing

democracy, and so are the Islamists ... they have that in common. They form a nice basis of mutual support and, in fact, are helping each other. The Islamists' goal is domination through Shariah law; the goals of the left are three things: reduce the nuclear family, organized religion and ownership of private property. They believe that this will liberate people and life will be better.

DAVID: Why do Europeans and American believe, for instance, the Waleed Aly Muslims when they say they are full of admiration for liberty and freedom in the West, while at the same time burning the U.S. and Israeli flags and carrying protest signs in the streets saying 'Freedom Go To Hell'?

PIPES: Westerners view Muslims in one of three ways. First view is they see Muslims growing in numbers and ultimately there will be Muslim domination; second, they believe everyone can and will get along ... yes there will be strains but eventually accommodations take place ... Muslims are becoming westernized, and Westerners are getting used to Muslims; the third view belongs to Westerners who do not like Muslim imposition and will ultimately rebel against and reject it.

DAVID: Which is the predominant view?

PIPES: The second is the most common but the least likely to succeed ... it's the default position of governments, media, academia and the arts. It's a wrong conclusion that we will all get along. Islam is incompatible with democracy, and as such would seem to have nothing functional to offer. Yet, if you go to establishment circles,

have to make ... the way we do business, schools, immigration, multiculturalism and the like ... the bromides are shaken when we admit there's a problem. We have intelligence agencies to confront terrorism, but how do you contend with people whose avowed aim is to replace the Constitution with the Quran? It's more difficult to fight those who are trying to eat away at us from the inside of a democratic, pluralistic, law-abiding society than it is to fight the terrorists. It's easy to argue for the suppression of bombers; not so easy to argue for the halting of those who exploit our openness and tolerance. And what measures does one take against them? The establishment doesn't like this dilemma.

DAVID: Where do you see this eventually going?

PIPES: I think the third scenario is most likely ... and the more the establishment is in denial, the more vociferous the counter. Westerners do not like the Islamization process and are going to rebel. It's already happening in Europe, slowly ... but it will escalate, and it will be fairly nasty.

DAVID: Can you give an example?

PIPES: Now you have, probably the most important political figure in Europe, Dutch parliamentarian Geert Wilders, leader of the Party For Freedom. Parties such as his didn't exist two decades ago. He puts forth an argument against Islamic law, and there has been an overwhelming receptivity to it. He's surrounded by six body guards at all times, but he's doing it. It's not happening here yet, but it's the future. Anti-Islamic sentiments are growing. This is an



the second view is self-reinforcing ... don't worry, it'll all work out.

DAVID: And in the face of events to the contrary, this view is still held?

PIPES: Yes, because the implications of concluding that there is a conflict are stark and unpleasant. It's much easier to believe that things will be OK than to believe the truth with its ensuing consequences.

DAVID: What are we afraid of?

PIPES: We're afraid to undertake the necessary changes we'll

unprecedented, civilizational challenge.

DAVID: Muslims have been exposed in recent history to the rewards and benefits of a free society. Kabul, Afghanistan, was known as the Paris of the East in the '60s; or similarly Beirut, Lebanon, up until 1972 ... and Turkey from 1923 to 1938 under President Ataturk, who completely westernized Turkey. Even the 9/11 hijackers lived well for nine months prior to killing themselves. Why does freedom get overthrown each time in favor of Shariah law?

PIPES: Muslims are very aware that the Muslim world is under stress ... literacy, health, wealth, innovation ... all are doing poorly. And the way they see forward is not by imitating the West, which hasn't gotten them anywhere; but by rejecting the West ... going back to medieval norms when Shariah law was applied. They were a strong, powerful and dominant people then. In their view, the West is full of problems ... just come to Las Vegas. They want to go their own way. They feel they can once again achieve dominance and success by returning to and replicating their golden age.

DAVID: How do we in the U.S. stand up to the encroaching threat of Islamism?

PIPES: Through education. We must learn about the Middle East and the Quran. Two major developments have occurred regarding this: The term Middle Eastern studies has evolved from the arcane field it used to be, into a very prominent field of study for young people. Then there's 9/11, and the Iraq and Afghanistan wars which are attracting students to Middle Eastern studies. Through education we can overturn ignorance about Islam, and our fear of being intolerant to an ideology that is destructive to our culture ... to reassert our will to stand up for our way of life before it's too late.

DAVID: Tell me about Campus Watch, a project you started in 2002?

PIPES: It is a critique of Middle East studies at North American universities. It's a project which seeks, by criticizing my

terrorism is the problem, what is the solution? Counterterrorism? That's not a military goal. But if militant Islam is the problem, then one can formulate, as I do, that moderate Islam is the solution. Our government needs to reach out to moderate Muslims ... meet with them, understand them, encouraging and supporting their own voice against militant Islam.

DAVID: Israel has always been on the front lines in combating militant Islam. What are her most imminent threats other than perhaps a nuclear Iran?

PIPES: Iran is the number one threat for the obvious reasons. But the next threat is not Egypt as many are led to believe, but Turkey. Other than increased elevated hostilities and a change in leadership, there is no real fundamental shift in Egypt. But in Turkey, the AKP government continues to ratchet up the rhetoric against Israel, and we don't know where that's leading to. Turkey is a significant country ... it has a large population ... a member of NATO. That said, it's important to remember that Israel is strong ... financially, militarily, technologically, scientifically.

DAVID: Has being a Jew played a significant role in your life's work to identify and stand up to the threats we face from the Middle East?

PIPES: I'm not sure how to answer that. I honestly don't know.

DAVID: What are your thoughts on the pending release of Gilad Shalit?



counterparts of the university, to improve the work and the accuracy of the material being taught on our campuses.

DAVID: How do you propose solving the problem of Muslims already living in our country, with the need to prevent their imposition on our way of life?

PIPES: Focusing on terrorism is a misnomer. Terrorism is a tactic, not an enemy. The enemy is militant Islam -- not Islam, the personal faith; not terrorism, the tactic. I believe if we see it this way, we will better understand the solution to the problem you mentioned. If

PIPES: I don't support it. I mean I'm happy for him and his family. But it's a strategic disaster for Israel to release over 1,000 enemies of the state... even worse, Israel will have to work very hard now to protect her soldiers from being kidnapped. A precedent has been set ... kidnap an Israeli soldier and gain the release of prisoners.

DAVID: How did you respond when al-Qaida invited you to "repent and enter into the light of Islam?"

PIPES: I declined, stating that I am faithful to my own religion, to my own country and to my civilization.