



WILLIAM F. STEINMETZ / Inquirer Staff Photographer
Daniel Pipes is director of the Middle East Forum, a Center City think tank.

Islam expert suddenly in the spotlight

By Murray Dubin
 INQUIRER STAFF WRITER

Those who work in think tanks generally don't make a habit of surfacing in public, swimming more often among scholars and policy-makers.

But Philadelphia think-tanker Daniel Pipes is surfacing as a big fish in open water, seen on *Nightline*, *Crossfire*, *Good Morning America*, and *Politically Incorrect* in the last 11 weeks, and being published in newspapers nationwide.

And that manuscript stuck in a drawer for years — "unpublishable," he says, because no one was interested in the topic — is suddenly big stuff. Its working title: *Muslim America*.

Meet the very serious, rather conservative and smoking-hot Pipes, 52, an expert on Islam who directs the Middle East Forum, publishes its Middle East Quarterly, and has written 12 books.

Before Sept. 11, he wrote regularly for just the Jerusalem-Post. Today, he does a weekly column for the New York Post as well. Now is his time.

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"In a sense, yes, it is," he says. "People are discussing Islam, what is important, and where it stands vis-a-vis the United States. The debate is becoming more sophisticated. The

world is focusing on issues I've been involved in for more than 30 years."

His preoccupation with the Mideast began as a Harvard University undergraduate, traveling and working during summers.

"I fell in love with the Sinai

desert. Thought I'd fall in love with the language of the Bedouins, too, but common sense prevailed and I decided to learn Arabic instead."

Why did he go? "I wanted to get out of the here and now, gain perspective, and immerse myself in Islam, the culture and

the language."

After graduation, he chose Egypt, not graduate school.

"Going to Cairo in 1971 was seen as eccentric," he says. "Good feelings did not exist then between the United States and Egypt. I lived on \$150 a month ... and lived very well.

My parents were not thrilled."

Two points of Pipes' history: One, his father is Richard Pipes, a preeminent scholar of the Soviet Union and communism who taught at Harvard for 46 years. Intellectual discussion was as common as mashed potatoes at the dinner table.

Two, as an undergraduate, Pipes supported the war in Vietnam, and lost friends because of his stance. "I was against what most of the students were for," he says. "College was interesting, but it was not fun for me."

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He returned to Harvard in 1973 to gain a graduate degree. He left in 1978, with a doctorate and a focus.

thoughtful than animated. Its wattage ratchets up a tad with talk of his three daughters, ages 16, 14 and 1, and his second wife, Beatriz Garcia.

He is tall, angular and black-bearded, with a face more

He rides a bicycle to a Center City office. He says he's so busy now that he's eaten his morning

cereal in front of the computer.

His middle daughter, Anna, was impressed that he sat next to actor Alec Baldwin while appearing on *Politically Incorrect*. Baldwin did not appear impressed with her father, excoriating him for supporting "every crypto-fascist" idea concerning Muslims living in America.

Pipes was calm then, and he is calm now: "We have to wake up from our innocence that anyone who comes to this country wishes us well."

So having law enforcement profile Muslims "is not pleasant, but necessary now."

Ten to 15 percent of all Muslims sympathize with the "militant Muslim agenda," he says. "It is a soft number, based on polling, my personal experiences, talking, studying."

Pipes has fans and critics.

"He is a historian by training, not a political scientist," says former Philadelphian Adam Garfinkle, a colleague when both worked at the Foreign Policy Research Institute here in the late 1980s. Garfinkle is editor of the National Interest magazine in Washington, and Pipes sits on his board.

"He reads ... voluminously. His views are pro-Zionist, yet he has no animus whatsoever toward Muslims or Arabs. When he is critical of Arab or Muslim policies in defense of Israel, he can do so with real scholarly knowledge. ... He can read and speak in Arabic, and that makes him unusual in the United States."

Murray Friedman, regional director of the American Jewish Committee, lauds Pipes' insight into the Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations.

"He understood that exceptional concessions would not contribute to peacemaking," Friedman says. "It would only be seen as, 'We got them on the run.' He was right, and I was wrong about that. I admire him.

"He's been saying that conventional thinking about Muslims didn't work. The liberal mind always romanticizes these issues — let's reach out, let's make peace. But he's said let's not confuse the Muslim culture and religion with the militant element. Again, Daniel has gone against the tide."

Too far, others say. "He's so malicious," says Ibrahim Hooper, spokesman for the Council on American-Islamic Relations in Washington.

"What is an Islamist? To him, anyone who has anything to say about politics. To him, all Islamists are potential killers."

Ian Lustick's criticism is more muted. "I give him credit to see a threat to this country from Islamists, but 10 to 15 per-

cent is way, way overrated," says the former president of the American Association for Israel Studies, who has debated Pipes.

Very few representing a "right-wing point of view are willing to debate someone as knowledgeable as I am," says Lustick, a University of Pennsylvania political science professor. "Those people are much more likely to appear alone, or publish in politically motivated journals, including his own. In that regard, I respect him."

But he adds: "My academic specialization is Arab-Israel relations. His professional expertise is seventh-century Islam."

Pipes says, "I stopped being a medieval historian a long time ago. Now I'm on the cutting edge of Islam and public policy, the Arab-Israeli conflict, and Syria."

He points out that Americans dying at the hands of militant Islamists is nothing new. But the feeling of danger is.

"Six hundred Americans have been killed since 1978 at military bases, embassies and air crashes, but that 600 didn't translate into fear and didn't puncture complacency. Pan Am 103 and the Marine barracks in Lebanon didn't lead to a mood or a political change. But the order of magnitude of Sept. 11 made it feel closer. ...

"The current expectation is that our success in the war will inflame Muslim emotions, but it's the opposite. ... Defeat leads to a tempering of emotions."

Pipes, who has worked for the Departments of Defense and State, says when he returned to Harvard in 1973, he knew what he wanted to study. "I had this idea living in Egypt and traveling in the Mideast that Islam was larger and more influential than the religion itself. ..."

That was the basis of his the-

sis and first two books, but not many in academia though he made a good choice of topics.

"It was seen as studying something that was dying, something that didn't have any relevance."

Not anymore.

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