

COLLEGE EDUCATION BY MURDER

By Daniel Mandel

Daniel Pipes has only lately been something of a household name in his own country. Although he never toiled in obscurity, the fact remains that during the 1990s, his views were out of kilter with conventional wisdom and general expectation.

Whilst politicians and analysts foresaw the successful culmination of an Arab-Israeli peace process and the subsiding of international terrorism in a global sphere marked by interdependence, Pipes was heralding a collapse into bloodshed and terrorists striking deep into America. All this came to pass pretty much as he predicted and suddenly the Harvard-educated Middle East specialist has come into his own. Now he has a weekly column in the mass-circulation *New York Post*, his website is receiving an exponential increase in visits and he has recently completed his latest book, *Militant Islam Reaches America*.

In Australia as a guest of the Centre for Independent Studies, on his third visit here (the other two being in 1984 and 1998), Pipes exhibits a characteristic conservative caution about sea changes and watersheds.

"There has been a significant change in that Americans realise that they are at war," Pipes begins. "Prior to that date, the US response was to think that these were acts of criminal violence. While these of course are acts of criminal violence, they fit into a larger context of a war, that is now understood."

September 11 might mark the dawn of a new age for the uninformed, but for Pipes it is simply the latest and most spectacular act in an Islamist campaign against America dating back to the Iranian revolution in 1979. Yet no one seems prepared to have called it a war and here Pipes stresses that the change is limited.

Asked if there is an emerging sense of an enemy within the citadel – American Islamists – Pipes replies, "No, by and large there isn't an understanding of that. There is an awareness that there are terrorists, that there are people who are engaged in planning or executing violence. But there is not an understanding that they fit into a larger context, that they are part of an ideological movement, part of an attempt to bring this radical ideology to the United States.

That is basically still not there."

Pipes believes that still greater horrors will in all probability follow before a genuine sea-change occurs.

"I think that as time goes on, the war effort is increasingly off-track," continues Pipes. For example, the Homeland Security Department, by rearranging government offices, hardly seems to me like a serious way of dealing with the problem. What we need are changes in policy – changes in immigration policy, changes in law enforcement, changes in security, for example, to airlines, changes in understanding, in developing the research, in who the enemy is."

Pipes concedes that some changes are occurring, but mostly belatedly and reluctantly.

"For example, there is a notorious programme called Visa Express which was started in May 2001, on a trial basis or experimental basis in Saudi Arabia. Visa Express allowed Saudis and I think other nationals living in Saudi Arabia to apply for visas to come to the United States by dropping off their papers at a travel agency. The travel agency would deal with the paperwork, would get the visa and the Saudi would appear in the United States. Three of the fifteen Saudi hijackers, suicide hijackers, came to the United States on this programme.

"It clearly was a mistake, but especially for Saudi Arabia. The State Department did not close it down, then it lied about closing it down – in fact it did it to me personally, in sworn testimony in front of the Congress. The head of consular affairs resigned and they still did not change it. They only changed it [last month]. So ten months later and only because there was one reporter who went after them. [Otherwise] it was business as usual, nothing changed for them."

Asked to be more specific as to methods of early apprehension, Pipes obliges. "I think that potential visitors and immigrants should be given background checks. We should find out who they are, politically, what they think of the United States, what their goals are. We have operated on the charmingly naïve assumption that all those who wish to come to the United States have benign intentions, so long as they do not have a criminal record and I think that needs to change. I don't see



September 11 has roused US security policy from complacency

that change taking place.”

But even timely detective work, as Pipes sees it, is only the beginning. He is emphatic that public understanding of the nature of the threat is being impeded by politically correct euphemisms like the ‘War on Terror’ and that a forthright acknowledgement that militant Islam is the enemy is necessary before the US government and public can adequately deal with it. But this is precisely what is not happening.

“Terrorism is a tactic, not an enemy,” says Pipes, reiterating a theme he has taken to many interviews and forums. “It’s like declaring war on submarines or trenches. Were there to be a fuller understanding of who the enemy is, that would make it possible to delineate who our allies are. And it is not just Britain, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. It is also moderate Muslims who have this very special role in taking the argument to fellow Muslims and pointing out to them that there is another way of understanding Islam. But so long as this is designated a ‘War on Terror’ there is no real likelihood of turning to moderate Muslims.”

Pipes calls the reluctant move to belated understanding akin to “college education by murder”.

However gloomy the picture, Pipes is not ultimately pessimistic. “My most fervent hope is to push things along so we can make the appropriate changes before people get murdered, not after.”

“I think there is movement,” he reassures. “I am happy overall with the way things are moving, I just want to make it go faster. Yes, definitely things are better than they were a year ago, in terms of understanding. I am confident that we will win this war. My worry is that we will have too many unnecessary casualties because we are not smart enough, fast enough.”

One development not occurring fast enough in Pipes’ judgement is America integrating the several conflicts involving Islamist terrorism waged against non-Muslim societies. It is only recently that the Bush administration has exhibited an inkling that Israel’s fight against suicide bombers is also America’s.

Citing the Israeli case, Pipes responds, “I’d add India to the mix. Yes, I think that is another casualty of the fact that we are not seeing this as a single whole, we are not seeing militant Islam as the enemy. If we did, then we would see that the Pakistani and Palestinian groups are akin to allies with the groups attacking the United States. It is unfortunate we need allies in this war and India and Israel are among others who are important to us. Instead of saying ‘thank you’ for taking part of this problem in your neck of the woods, we are trying to hem them in. I would let them loose to do what they need to do”.

In the Israeli-Palestinian war, Pipes holds that, in the past, the Palestinians believed, and were right to believe, that they were extracting serious gains from Israel through terror and violence. Now the pendulum has swung.

“I think there was a switch that took place in November last year and I think the Israelis are winning since that time. I think they are conveying the signal that they are determined. They can do it and they will do it and the Palestinians had better stop the violence sooner [rather] than later. I think it is leading to a greater difficulty in the Palestinians finding suicide bombers. I mean what is the good of it? Yes, you kill some Israelis but you cause real hardship on the Palestinians, the further erosion of the PA’s authority and you are not getting closer to any of your goals. I would urge the Israelis to make it clear to the Palestinians that violence is not working, that it is counter productive and futile.”

However, that is not the same as suggesting that Palestinian goals have changed. They remain for Pipes what they always were, despite successive agreements with Israel. “They might sign anything, but what do they really want? It is always the same, they want to destroy Israel.

What their current losing strategy might convey to them is that suicide bombing and other forms of violence is ineffectual and they might reconsider. [But] I don’t think they are anywhere close to giving up their ambitions. I

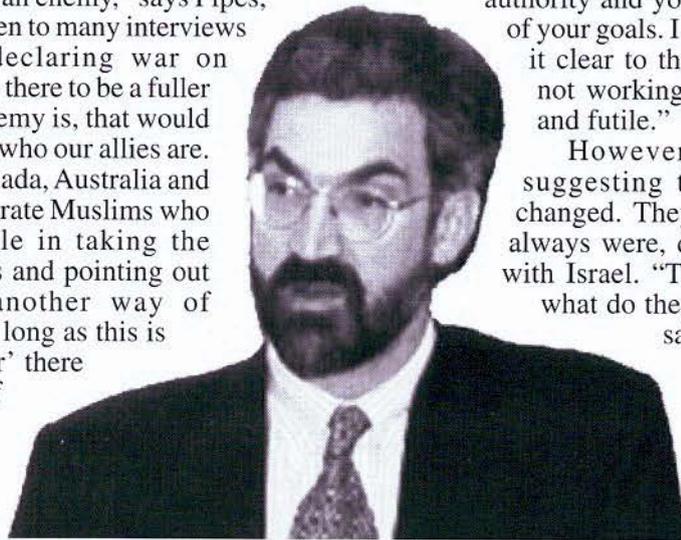
think that is going to take decades. Peace is a word we should not use. The best we could hope for is some form of quiet. An ending of this carnage, these atrocities carried out by the Palestinians.”

Today, many policy specialists are only too eager to devise new modalities for negotiated settlements and to return to the Clinton plan as though nothing had occurred before or since. In contrast, Pipes is downright sceptical of the advantages that might accrue from the latest hankering for Palestinian democratisation and fresh leadership. He believes that Palestinians need to relinquish their ambitions to exterminate Israel before democracy will ever become ingrained in their society, just as Germany had to relinquish its dream of European domination before democracy was entrenched in German society.

“An improvement in Palestinian government and a strengthening of the economy could lead to more troubles. You could have the same Palestinian determination to destroy Israel but now with a better arsenal, a stronger hand in fighting Israel. I think the key is to convince the Palestinians over the long term – it will take decades – that their goal of destroying Israel is futile and they have to come to terms with it, accept it and go their own way.

“And by the way, only at that point when the Palestinians do accept Israel, can they begin to build a decent society, one in which the economy develops and political freedoms and culture flourish. That is all within the realm of the possible but not so long as the Palestinians are haunted by this demon of wanting to destroy Israel. The demon hurts them even more than it hurts the Israelis. I conclude that as much as the Israelis need the victory over the Palestinians in order to have decent lives without being attacked all the time, the Palestinians even more need to lose so they can build a decent life.”

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Daniel Pipes: “Terrorism is a tactic, not an enemy”