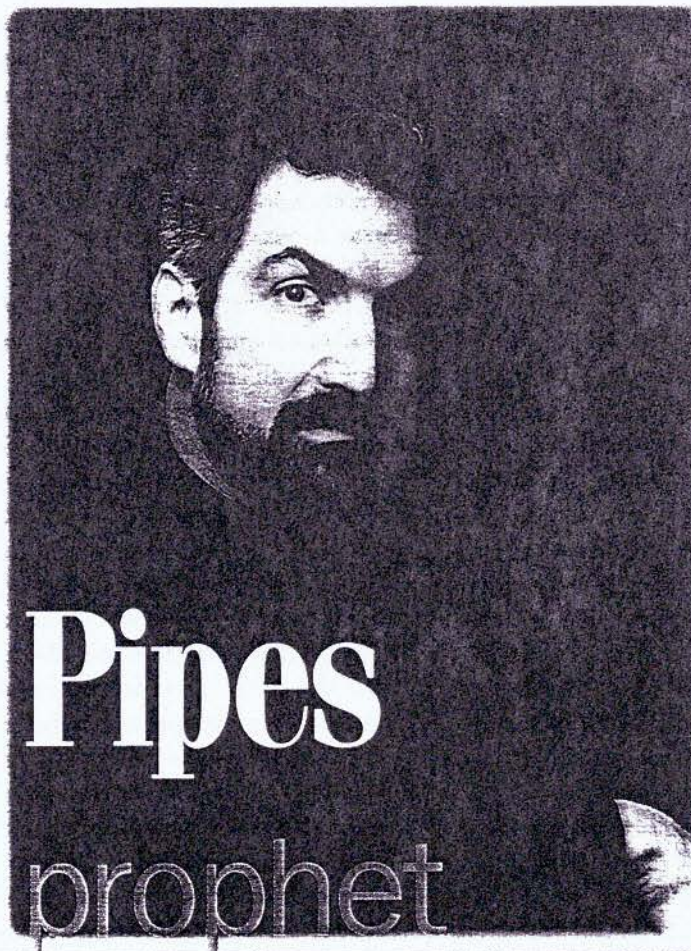


Daniel Pipes

prophet

by Leonard Getz



When Daniel Pipes graduated from Harvard in 1978 with a Ph.D. in History and Middle Eastern Studies, he did not expect to occupy a 10th floor office with a view of the center city streets of Philadelphia. He had every reason to believe his office would overlook a sprawling university campus, perhaps his alma mater where his father, Richard Pipes, now retired, was a professor of history for almost 50 years. He had already lectured at Harvard for a year, but when the university chose instead a candidate with Marxist leanings, and no other university of significance made him an offer, Pipes found, a different type of campus: the American and the Middle East political landscape. He surveys the scene as the Director of the Middle East Forum, a non-profit organization he founded in 1994.

"The Middle East Forum fills the niche of looking at the Middle East with a clear and self-conscious intent to promote American interests," Pipes explains from his book-lined corner office. Down the hall his small staff works on arranging the Forum's year-round lecture series, conferences, fund-raising dinners and most importantly, its publication, the *Middle East Quarterly*. "We receive most of our financial support from individuals who feel passionately about our subject and support the ideas we advocate.

"We look at the big picture and hope to influence a wide public audience that includes journalists, government officials, businesses and especially the university audience."

Why is the university audience so critical?

"Other quarterlies that cover the same subject blame the United States and its allies—mainly Israel and Turkey—for most of the Middle East's problems. The *Middle East Quarterly* is the only scholarly publication whose views more closely resemble that of mainstream America than that of the scholar."

Going against the political views of his contemporaries is not new for Pipes. During the turbulent 1960s, when he listened and watched his fellow students itching to destroy America, Pipes' anomalistic voice was saying, "Let's improve it." His political education took shape as his father's academic appointments led him overseas. Pipes spent second grade in Paris, seventh grade in Switzerland and summers in Europe, Africa and Israel. His conclusion: "This country is a remarkable place. I didn't want to pull things down."

Pipes came to be an expert on the Middle East by a circuitous route. In fact, he began as a mathematician. "I wasn't all that competent, so I chose to become a historian." In 1969 Pipes spent some time in the Sinai peninsula and "got hooked" on the desert. He wrote his thesis on Islamic history of the 7th, 8th, and 9th centuries. By the time he received his Ph.D., Khomeini had grabbed the world's attention. So Pipes segued from the medieval world to the modern Muslim world.

Pipes has written extensively on this subject in magazines such as *The Atlantic Monthly*, *Business Week*, *Commentary*, *Foreign Affairs*, *Foreign Policy*, *Harper's*, *National Interest*, *National Review*, *New Republic* and *The Weekly Standard*. Newspapers, such as the *Los Angeles Times*, *The New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Washington Post*, the *Christian Science Monitor* and the *International Herald Tribune*, carry his articles. He has also written, among other works, *Slave, Soldier and Islam*, *In the Path of God* and *An Arabist Guide to Egypt Colloquial*.

Pipes is one of 30 scholars worldwide who has written books about Syria. *Syria Beyond the Peace Process* (Washington Institute, 1996), *Damascus Courts the West: Syrian Politics, 1989-91* (Washington Institute, 1991), and *Greater Syria* (Oxford University Press, 1990). But he is the only one of them who believes that Syrian President Hafez Assad has not made a strategic decision for peace with Israel.

"All of us are attempting to discern Assad's thinking. None of us know it. So we take his statements, the actions of his government (we assume he is in total control) and we offer hypotheses to explain it. I like to draw the analogy of our understanding of the planetary system. First we believed the sun orbited around the Earth. As we learned more about astronomy it became more difficult to sustain this view. Along came Copernicus who said try reversing it. Suddenly everything became clear. The same is true when looking at Syria. If you hypothesize that Assad made a strategic decision for peace, then you have to do a lot of explaining. For example, if he's made this decision in 1988, as some scholars postulate, why has nothing happened yet? But if you assume that he has not made an effort to reach an agreement with Israel—his actions just a tactical ploy—then all that has taken place makes sense."

And what does Pipes think of Israel's Deputy Defense Minister Ephraim Sneh's statement in November 1999. "We operate under the assumption that Syria has a vested interest in peace with Israel, regardless of who leads it. We cannot waste our time with speculation about the stability of regimes. This will get us nowhere."

Pipes replies with a question: "When the United States was negotiating with the Soviet Union, wasn't it very important to know with whom we were dealing? Assad has broken his word time after time. There is no point in signing treaties with his totalitarian regime. It makes a huge difference who you're dealing with."

Pipes' advice is clearly respected in the United States as he is on the board of 15 prestigious committees and organizations including the American-Turkish Council, New Atlantic Institute, United States Committee for a Free Lebanon, Jewish Policy Center, and the United Nations Association of the U.S.A.

One U.S. official who listens to what Pipes has to say is U.S. Senator Arlen Specter (R-PA). Senator Specter tells *Lifestyles*, "As director of the Middle East Forum in Philadelphia, Daniel Pipes has been a great resource in providing timely and insightful information on the beliefs and politics of the Middle East."

"The Middle East Forum in general and Daniel Pipes in particular certainly have an impact on how the American public and U.S. officials think about the intricacies, nuances and subtleties of Middle East politics," says Ziad Abdelnour, President of the United States Committee for a Free Lebanon. "The Middle East Forum has been instrumental in lifting the veil on the Arab world."

There is some evidence that his advice and that of the Middle East Forum, is beginning to be heeded in Israel. An article in the September 1999 issue of the *Middle East Quarterly*, "The Collapsing Syrian Economy" by Steven Plaut, warned of rushing to reach an agreement with Syria. "The present is the very worst time strategically to strike a deal with Syria...Israel should impose economic burdens on it by strengthening [its] military position...This could lead to a collapse of the totalitarian regime in Syria."

"Shortly after this was published," Pipes noted, "Israel's leading newspaper *Ha'aretz* printed an article mirroring the same ideas, and the notion has since become fairly widespread."

For an article to be selected for publication in the *Middle East Quarterly*, the editors usually must answer "NO" to the following question: "Is this an article other quarterlies would publish?" Pipes seeks out those whose voices excluded

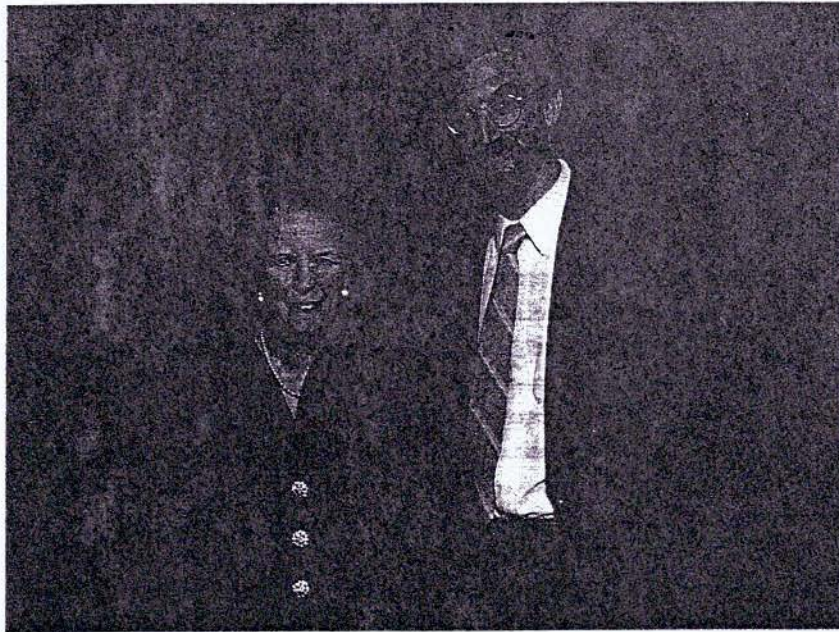


photo courtesy of Daniel Pipes

With former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher.

from the scholarly debate by the reigning academic hegemony. For example, Syrian specialists widely hold "that fundamentalist Islam is a force for democratization." Pipes disagrees. "Fundamentalists are radical utopians ready to impose 'their' views by any means necessary, including totalitarian force. And they are not just in the Middle East. They are also active in the United States, where they aspire to make this country into an Islamic state."

Last summer Pipes published an article, "It Matters What Kind of Islam Prevails," that appeared in the *Los Angeles Times* and was subsequently widely reprinted. He noted that there are two types of Moslems in the United States: integrationists who are patriotic Americans and committed Moslems, and "chauvinists who aggressively want to impose Islamic law as the solution to all of the country's ills." He cited a 1996 incident when basketball player Mahmoud Abdul-Rauf, a convert to Islam, refused to stand for the American national anthem and said the American flag was a "symbol of oppression, of tyranny."

The *Star Tribune* of Minneapolis published a "Counterpoint" by Ibrahim Hooper, national communications director for the Council on American-

Islamic Relations (CAIR), that called Pipes names ("anti-Islam") rather than address the issues he raised. The Committee for Accuracy on Middle East Reporting in America (CAMERA) responded by pointing out that "CAIR is a political front for the terrorist organization Hamas with ties to the Hamas infrastructure in the U.S."

Pipes poses the question, "As these fundamentalist groups become more aggressive, more forceful, how will America respond? By appeasing them?" He then offers his suggestion: "The U.S. government and body politic should discredit them like it does the KKK. It should uplift the non-radical Moslems."

At 6'4", 50-year-old Daniel Pipes towers over his guest speakers, in this case former U.S. representative to the United Nations Dr. Jeanne Kirkpatrick, at a "Middle East Briefing" that took place at the law office of Weil Gotshal & Manges in New York City. Ms. Kirkpatrick was one of seven speakers during the fall 1999 "invitation-only" briefings. She told a group of 75 business executives, diplomats, journalists, academics and foreign policy experts about Syria's "death grip" on Lebanon and how

the PLO were accomplices in the Syrian-backed killing of the 248 American Marines in 1983.

Dr. Kirkpatrick claims, "Daniel is a scholar, an intellectual with an active and fertile mind with a deep reservoir of information. When you consider his writings, and the establishment of the *Middle East Quarterly*, American opinion on the Middle East, particularly Syria, has been significantly affected."

Other speakers Pipes has scheduled were Abdul Hakeem Mujahid, the Taliban's representative-designate to the United Nations and Iraqi opposition leader Ahmad Chalabi, about his plan to bring down the Saddam Hussein regime.

What does Daniel Pipes think of Chalabi's plan and for enforcing the UN sanctioned inspections on Iraq?

"I'm of two minds. Saddam is ghastly, from both a human point of view and from an American-interest point of view. But we Americans have a tendency to burden ourselves with other people's problems and thereby letting everyone else off the hook. Why are we begging the local countries in the region to join our efforts? The Kuwaitis are standoffish, and why not? America is doing all the work anyway, they say, so we might as well reap

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the benefits. I'd like to turn the equation around: have them pleading with us to take care of Saddam."

Pipes is of one mind when it comes to what is needed for a true peace between Israel and the Arabs. On March 11, 1998 he testified before a subcommittee of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and recommended that the United States support "ending the demand for open-ended Israeli accommodation until there is a commensurate Arab response."

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"Daniel knows what he's talking about," says former *Commentary* magazine editor Norman Podhoretz. Pipes is a frequent contributor to *Commentary*, published by the American Jewish Committee. "He has clarified many truths and realities Israel will face and helps change the climate of opinion regarding chances for peace between Israel and the Arabs. He's reliable and doesn't pull any punches."

"There are essentially two positions for Israel on the question of lands captured in 1967," explains Pipes. "One is that, from a strategic or religious point of view, Israel must hold on to all territories. This is untenable because Israel is too small to push its will against the entire world. The other is Israel give up land for benefits and guarantees. I accept that. But what benefits, what guarantees? I would say that Israel needs significant indications of a change of heart among Arabs—that they no longer intend to destroy Israel, that they have come to terms with the permanent existence of a Jewish State in the Middle East. But I don't see that happening."

"In principle I'm not against the peace process; I just think it's moving too fast. Israel should wait until the Arabs have a change of heart. In the meantime, it should pursue a policy of deterrence."

"I realize that this approach has drawbacks: It's expensive, it's passive, it's boring. But it's realistic. It acknowledges that the key decisions of war and peace are made by the Arabs. The Israelis like to think they do, but a booming economy, a dynamic society, and a powerful military don't change this basic fact."

"The views of the Israeli electorate are quite clear. They want out, and they want it quickly. An illustration is Israeli Prime Minister Barak's promise to leave Lebanon by July 2000. Another is the lack of interest in seeing the Palestinian Authority fulfill its agreements. Barak demands Palestinian compliance only to put pressure on Arafat to reach another agreement. It makes you scratch your head. What? Another agreement by which Arafat gets more land? I never heard of signing agreements and then not having any interest in their compliance. I'm slightly bewildered by the Israelis today."

But Pipes also observes a positive influence of Israel's political culture on the Palestinian Arabs. The fact that they learn Hebrew, listen to the Israeli news, and make demands of their own leaders brings hope that the Palestinian entity will have a more open quality than do the other Arab regions.

As new information appears on the scene, Pipes puts it into context. When Edward Said, the intellectual "Palestinian," was exposed as growing up in an upper class Egyptian family, Pipes wrote an article for the *Jerusalem Post* about another famous "Palestinian" who was born and raised in Cairo, Yasser Arafat. And when the

Egyptian government-sponsored media baselessly proposed that a U.S. surface-to-air missile may have caused the crash of EgyptAir flight 990 when American inquiry revealed a very strong possibility that an Egyptian pilot caused the crash, Pipes reflected on the nature of the Egypt-U.S. relationship. In a November 24, 1999 *Wall Street Journal* article Pipes wrote, "Despite what the State Department likes to call a 'long and close friendship' with Egypt, the U.S. should take a close look at its relationship with Cairo which has been on autopilot for too long."

His willingness to step forward and express an opinion makes Pipes frequently called upon to appear on television "news" programs. He has appeared on, among others, *ABC World News*, *CBS This Morning*, *CBS Reports*, *CNN Special Events*, *Firing Line*, *Good Morning America*, *NewsHour with Jim Lehrer*, *Nightline* and *The Today Show*.

Pipes has the unique ability to explain the complexities of the Middle East with eloquent simplicity. But in spite of 15 years of disseminating information on the air, publishing 10 books, editing several others and publishing countless magazine and newspaper articles, Pipes still has not received a single offer from any university. Why?

"I have the simple politics of a truck driver, not the complex ones of an academic. My viewpoint is not congenial with institutions of higher learning."

Daniel Pipes may not fit into the politically-correct ambience of today's academe, but he does have a large and growing audience that looks to him for his distinctive analysis. They used to call someone like this a prophet. Invariably people rued the day they didn't listen.

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