

Militant Islam Is Put In Class With Communism, Fascism

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Daniel Pipes' voice is so soft it sometimes sounds like a whisper. Yet the words he uses can startle. America and rest of the Western world, he says, are facing their greatest challenge since fascism and communism: militant Islam.

Coming from anyone else, such views might be dismissed as alarmist. But Pipes has been studying Middle Eastern politics and culture all his life. The Harvard Ph.D. is director of the Philadelphia-based Middle East Forum and author of a dozen books.

His most recent book is "Militant Islam Reaches America," due out Sept. 11. He talked with IBD about it.

IBD: When did militant Islam start to become a phenomenon in America?

Pipes: It built up over time, but I would date its emergence as a significant factor — both politically and in terms of violence — to 1990.

1990 saw a couple of murders, such as Meir Kahane (a Jewish radical) and Rashad Khalifa (an Egyptian immigrant). They were very different cases, but they both happened in 1990.

There had been prior acts of violence, but this was the time when it became a significant factor. 1990 also marked the founding of the American Muslim Council, one of the most prominent militant Islamic organizations.

IBD: What exactly is the goal of militant Islam?

Pipes: The goal is universally the same — to take power and impose its strictures on society. There is a debate on how to take power. Some believe violence is the way. Some believe that working in the system is the way. It is an incipient effort in the U.S., but it is, nevertheless, an effort.

IBD: This is a political agenda, but not a religious one?

Pipes: It conforms to the goals of Islam, but the key question is do you, as a Muslim in the U.S., accept the basics of American civilization, including its Constitution, or do you want to change it? Some will say the first and some will say the latter. The latter are adherents of militant Islam.

IBD: How much of a debate is there within the Muslim community about this?

Pipes: There is strikingly very little debate. There is the occasional protest and there are certain individu-

als who are dedicated to a nonmilitant approach, but by and large one of the dismaying and problematic factors is that militant Islam dominates the Muslim discourse in this country.

IBD: Are the political efforts of these Muslim groups similar to, say, Christian conservatives?

Pipes: There is no similarity whatsoever. They are unrelated phenomena. The Christian groups essentially want to practice their religion their way. The militant Islamic groups want to impose their views on everyone else. Christian groups have no state sponsorship. Muslim

Daniel Pipes



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groups have substantial state sponsorship. Christian groups work entirely through the system. Militant Islam is conspicuously violent.

IBD: What is it about militant Islam that appeals to its adherents?

Pipes: It is a massive way of saying "no" to modernity and to Western life. You can say "no" not just to government policies, but to an entire way of life.

IBD: Is this something that could attach itself to the anti-globalization, anti-IMF movement?

Pipes: Yes, but I wouldn't restrict it to that. It is much larger than that. It is a worthy successor to fascism and communism. It is the international threat.

IBD: Some people draw a connection between the growth of militant Islam and poverty. Is there a connection?

Pipes: They are unrelated. As one wag put it after noting the origins of the Sept. 11 suicide terrorists last year, the key to becoming a suicide bomber is to be affluent, educated and privileged. This has to do with culture and ideology. Look at Saudi

Arabia. It's hardly a poor country.

IBD: Is this something being directed from Islamic countries overseas? Or is this a local phenomenon?

Pipes: A mix. There was seed money coming from abroad, and still continuing. But I wouldn't see the local leadership as the pawns of foreign states. They are making their own decisions.

IBD: What do they do to advance their agenda?

Pipes: A variety of things. One is conversion. Lobbying to increase immigration is another. Third is to lobby to privilege Islam in a variety of ways. Fourth is to raise money for militant Islamic groups abroad. The fifth way is to intimidate those who would be critical, such as myself.

IBD: Their argument is that they are operating legally within the system and that you are simply fear-mongering. How do you respond to that?

Pipes: I am operating legally within the system as well, but I am not threatening anyone. The fact is that militant Islam has a long history of using violence. These people are taking advantage of that. There are so many examples of violence in this country by militant Islamic elements. I am not fear-mongering.

IBD: Is this something that law enforcement is taking seriously?

Pipes: Nope. Robert Mueller, director of the FBI, gave an audience to the American Muslim Council. Outrageous. These are people he should be looking at in terms of arresting them, not breaking bread with them.

IBD: Would you see the cases of John Walker Lindh or Jose Padilla as examples of effects of militant Islam in America?

Pipes: Absolutely, yes. There is a big difference in Lindh's case between his mother converting to Buddhism and his becoming a supporter of militant Islam. Buddhism is not a threat to anyone.

For that matter, the faith of Islam is not a threat. Unfortunately the faith of Islam can be a way of becoming a supporter of militant Islam. That is threatening.

My view is that Islam itself is not the problem. It is the interpretation of Islam today that is the problem.

IBD: Where do you see militant Islam in, say, five to 10 years?

Pipes: There are some scholars who argue that militant Islam is on the decline. I find that argument unconvincing. I think it is still on the increase. I think it has a ways to go before it peaks.