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Daniel (Pipes) in the Lions' Den

by David Gerstman

The academic world of Middle Eastern studies is an unusual place. It could be said that it is a world that is hostile to the Western values of freedom and democracy. It certainly is hostile to Israel. It is a world where political beliefs are more important than scholarship. In this world, the ideas of an English professor of Arab extraction at Columbia University, Edward Said, carry more weight than those of Bernard Lewis, a scholar who has studied the Middle East for more than a half century.

It is also a world that is hostile to those who don't agree with its core values. Those people are not merely wrong; they are "imperialists" or "racists," whose opinions are beyond the pale of fair-minded discourse. To its critics and opponents, then, the

(cont. from page 56)

(<http://www.danielpipes.org/article/165>) appeared in the April 1983, issue of *Commentary* magazine. The article analyzed the apparent contradiction between the PLO's behavior toward Palestinians in Lebanon and its role as their representative. In short, Pipes concluded that PLO represented the interests of Arab regimes more than it represented the interests of its supposed constituents.

(There's an interesting irony here: shortly after this article appeared, an editorial in the *New York Times* praised the analysis. Presumably, the editorial was written by A.M. Rosenthal, who was a lot more sensible about the Middle East than any of his successors. It's hard to imagine any recent editorials in the *Times* praising Pipes or promoting an article that appeared in *Commentary*.)

Shortly after the article appeared, King Hussein rejected an opportunity to play a role in representing the Palestinians. At the time, the king's refusal was deemed a blow to peacemaking efforts. It also was an

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world of Middle Eastern studies is a lions' den. Daniel Pipes, a scholar of the Middle East, has taken up the challenge posed by the current Middle Eastern studies establishment. He critiques the views espoused in the academy both internally and externally.

Pipes' influence has grown tremendously in the past 20 years. In the early 1980s he was frequent contributor to political magazines and an occasional presence in daily newspapers. Now, in addition to running a think tank (the Middle East Forum) and publishing a scholarly journal (the *Middle East Quarterly*), Pipes writes a weekly newspaper column, appears regularly on TV news shows, and still contributes to the political magazines. (Most, if not all, of

effect of the political forces described by Pipes.

Seventeen year later, events confirmed the thesis of Pipes' article. Shortly after Yasser Arafat rejected Ehud Barak's concessions at Camp David in 2000, an article in the *New York Times* reported that the governments of both Egypt and Saudi Arabia had threatened Arafat with diplomatic isolation if he agreed to anything less than complete control over Jerusalem.

More than describing the political forces that were still active 17 years later, the harrowing details Pipes provided of life under the PLO in Lebanon accurately presaged what life would be under the Palestinian Authority in Judea, Samaria, and Gaza.

The other must-read article by Pipes was co-authored with investigative reporter Steven Emerson. "Terrorism on Trial" (<http://www.danielpipes.org/article/381>) appeared in the *Wall Street Journal* on May 31, 2001. The article recounts information gleaned from the

these contributions are available, free, by email subscription.) Through his activities, Daniel Pipes has almost single-handedly changed the war of ideas about the Middle East from a rout to a competition.

It is not enough that Pipes seems to be almost everywhere. Nor is it sufficient that he challenges the conventional wisdom about the Middle East and the Muslim world. What is important is that he often is correct, whether or not his critics acknowledge it.

There are two articles by Pipes that I'd recommend to anyone who wants to appreciate his ability as an analyst. One has stood the test of time; the other, unfortunately, was confirmed in the space of three months. "How Important is the PLO?"

(cont. on page 58)

transcripts of trials of defendants convicted of plotting the bombing of the American embassies in Tanzania and Kenya in 1998. There was enough information to tell the government how potent a threat Al-Qaeda posed for the United States. Pipes and Emerson wrote, "To fight Al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups requires an understanding that they (along with some states) have silently declared war on the U.S.; in turn, we must fight them as we would in a war." It was a warning that went unheeded until several months later, after September 11. (The government wasn't alone in failing to follow up on the trial. As Pipes and Emerson noted, no media outlet pursued this story.)

In these two cases and more, Pipes effectively predicted future occurrences by accurately assessing readily available information. So it is important to pay attention to him when he contradicts conventional wisdom and offers prescriptions for the future.

On October 9 of this year, Dr.
(cont. on page 100, col. C)

(Daniel...cont. from page 58)

Pipes spoke at Beth Tfiloh Congregation about the current situation in the Middle East. In that talk he prescribed the "three no's of Baltimore" as necessary components to peace in the Middle East.

The first ingredient in the Pipes formula was there should be no more agreements with dictators. The idea that agreements between Israel and its enemies advances the cause of peace is a cruel illusion. In fact, now anti-Zionism in the Arab world is stronger than it was prior to the start of the Oslo process in 1993.

The next element was that there should be no quick fixes. In this case, Dr. Pipes criticized President Bush for backing away from his tough speech this past June. When the President gave his speech, he insisted that reform and the absence of terrorists were prerequisites for a Palestinian state. Three months later, the President was calling for a Palestinian state and dropped the requirement of reform. Even now, news from Israel suggests that the President now is committed to a "road map" for peace that absolves the Palestinian Authority of any responsibility to change.

Finally, Pipes asserted that there should be no more Israeli concessions. Israel's concessions until now have been counterproductive.

When we read various "experts" encouraging American pressure on Israel, calling for more Israel concessions, or wondering how to stop the "cycle of violence," we should remember that these experts have been more wrong than right when assessing the Middle East. They might constitute a lions' den, but they have nothing on Daniel. *