

▶ INTERVIEW

by **SARA LEHMANN**

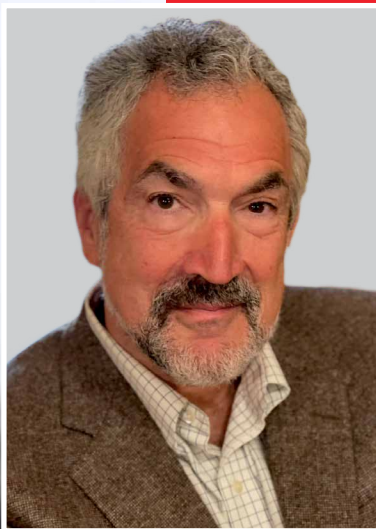
EYES ON

ISRAEL



Attia Muhammed/Flash90

Palestinians riot on the Israeli border with Gaza, east of Gaza City, January 26.



DANIEL PIPES is an acclaimed authority in the realm of Middle East scholarship. With a Ph.D. from Harvard University, Pipes taught at universities around the country and served as an official in the U.S. Departments of State and Defense. The author of 16 books, his biweekly column is published in The Washington Times and other publications.

Pipes is perhaps most recognized for founding and operating the prestigious Middle East Forum. The MEF is an independent non-profit organization dedicated to promoting American interests in the Middle East. It includes Campus Watch, which exposes biases in Middle East Studies in American universities, and The Legal Project, which protects against predatory lawsuits filed by Islamists as well as combating free-speech restrictions.

I spoke with Dr. Pipes about the topics he specializes in: the role of Islam in public life, the Arab-Israeli conflict, and U.S. foreign policy. His views confirm his reputation as a fearless and sometimes controversial figure with the courage to express uncomfortable truths.





What motivated you to become interested in the study of Islam?

During college, I traveled in the Middle East and Africa and was curious to understand more. As a result, I switched from being a math major to studying the Middle East and Arabic. Primarily, I tried to understand the impact of Islam on the life of people, Muslims and non-Muslims alike, not so much the theology but the historical role of Islam. My Ph.D. was precisely on that subject — understanding the role of Islam in politics and public life. I've never left the subject, but I've moved on to do other things as well.

One of those is founding the Middle East Forum. What kind of views do you hope to promote through it?

With the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the Oslo Accords, I thought it was a good time to start a think tank that looks at the Middle East specifically from the point of view of American interests. As a historian, it takes a historical perspective of the big picture. It's changed over 29 years, but the basic idea of looking at American interests remains in place. The major addition has been to look also at Islam in the West.

You're recognized as an expert in the field and an outspoken critic of radical Islam, which is responsible for much of Islamic terrorism. How do you explain the roots of terrorism as it relates to the Islamic religion



and culture?

Islam is the most political of religions, whose public laws are very much alive. To apply Islamic public laws, you need to have a Muslim ruler. So, Islam by its very nature includes a drive to power. It means if non-Muslims are ruling — to replace them with Muslims; if Muslims are ruling — to replace them with rulers who will apply the laws. It's a powerful dynamic in Islam.

The modern Islamist movement takes this and makes it central to its program — it's power, power, power. It's influenced by 20th century radical movements of the West, like fascism, so that you have something like the Taliban or ISIS where Islam is everything, just like Marxism is everything. There is no alternative to it, whereas traditional Islam was far less demanding.

You once said that "radical Islam is the problem, moderate Islam is the solution." How many moderate Muslims are there compared to the radicals and how can they moderate Islam?

When I came up with that formulation 20 years ago, the moderates were indeed scarce. They are far more apparent now than they were then. They have more of a voice, are better organized and more on the offense now. You can see them in governments, like Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi and Saudi Arabian Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, to mention two powerful figures. You also see this in the West. In the U.S., there are now visible, articulate Muslims who are fighting the Islamist variant with books and platforms. But there's a long way to go.



AP Photo/Alex Brandon, File
L-R: Bahrain Foreign Minister Khalid bin Ahmed Al Khalifa; Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu; former President Donald Trump, and United Arab Emirates Foreign Minister Abdullah bin Zayed al-Nahyan, sit during the Abraham Accords signing ceremony on the South Lawn of the White House, Sept. 15, 2020.

Do you see the Abraham Accords as a successful derivative of this process?

Yes. The process really began under President Obama with the U.S. government deemphasizing the Middle East on the one hand and seeking to appease the Iranian government on the other hand. This alarmed many in the Middle East, particularly in the Persian Gulf, and Israel was there as an alternative to the U.S. It was less the weakness of Islamism and more the weakness of the U.S. that caused the Emirates and others to rely more on Israel.

In an address to AIPAC, Netanyahu recently said that he's optimistic because "Arab leaders have changed their views regarding Israel and now see us as partners, not enemies." Yet Israel was roundly condemned

for Ben-Gvir's visit to the Temple Mount by the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan. How reliable do you think these Islamic countries are as "partners" if they ever feel that their religion is challenged?

I had a piece last month in *Commentary*, called Israel's Partial Victory, where I made the argument that the Arab states were at war with Israel for 25 years, from 1948-1973. It's around 50 years that they have not been at war, with two minor exceptions in 1982 and 1991. They have given up. Not every one of them, not the Syrian government. But in general, the Arab-speaking governments have come to terms with Israel.

It's real. The Israelis are selling them major armaments. You don't sell major armaments to a government you think might turn around against you. But as you point out, there are real disagreements, and Jerusalem in general and the Temple Mount in particular are probably the most emotional and divisive of them. Generally, what's been the pattern is that the Arab states have better bilateral relations with Israel than multilateral. When it comes to the Arab League, Islamic organizations, or the U.N., they invariably are negative about Israel, but when its bilateral they tend to be positive. There are tensions, but I don't think they're severe enough to jeopardize the relationship. What could jeopardize it is if the Iranians get even more threatening and the Emirates and others get scared and pull back.

On the flip side, what if the Iranian threat disappears, perhaps as a result of regime change due to ongoing demonstrations, and what if what initially brought these countries together with Israel dissipates? Are there enough economic and other motivations to justify the endurance of the Abraham Accords?

That's an interesting question. I'm inclined to think yes. I think that this is a longer-term dynamic and it's proceeding. The Iranian common enemy is an incentive. But take it away, I don't think it will disappear. The Palestinian issue remains a problem, but it's not enough to stop it. There is a long-term shift by the Arab states from the ferocious enmity of the 25-year period to generally calmer relations, including six peace agreements.

The peace agreements demonstrated that the Palestinian issue was not the problem. You have advocated for what you call the Israel Victory Project relating to Israel's relationship with the Palestinians. Can you describe what it is and what kind of support it has garnered both within Israel and without?

Our efforts in the U.S. Congress were fairly effective. In 2017-2018, we had a caucus of, at its peak, 35 members in the House. We have since



The Royal Hashemite Court via AP
Jordan's Crown Prince Hussein (R) and Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi (C) at the airport in Amman, Jordan, Dec. 20.

abandoned that and focused on Israel, the Knesset, and many other institutions. We are finding that there is a broad sympathy for the idea, which is a quite radical idea.

Many people have spoken about the need to impress on the Palestinians that Israel is there and its government can't be defeated. Israel Victory takes it a step further and says that not only do the Palestinians have to understand that Israel won't be defeated, but the Palestinians need to be defeated. That's going further than anyone else does.

How would you define defeat?

Very simply — defeat is imposing your will on your enemy. Whatever that might be. In this case, it would be accepting that Israel is there and permanent. My research suggests that through the past century over 20% of Palestinians have accepted that. Arabs played a very important role, especially in the pre-independence period, when they sold land, intelligence, and arms and provided all sorts of assistance to Jews. The rest are in denial, and the goal has to be to increase that [20%] to 40-60%.

How do you do that?

That is the challenge. First you have to make it your goal, which the Israeli government has not. Take Gaza. The goal there is just to keep things quiet. My argument is that the Israeli security establishment — the IDF,

intelligence services, police, and other services — just want quiet. They want no rockets or missiles coming out of Gaza and that's acceptable. I'm saying it's not.

My argument is that there are three dangers: One is violence, be they missiles or knife attacks or anything else. The second is, once again, the U.S. and European governments queuing up to have a peace process, which I call the war process and which is counterproductive. The third and, perhaps, most important, is the virulent hostility towards Israel around the world — on the left, among Muslims, from the far right, among various assorted dictators, and among certain Christian elements. No country has such hostility towards it [like] Israel has. So far that hasn't had that much impact. Israel is flourishing, and so Israelis tend to shrug it off. I'm saying don't be so cavalier.

But doesn't the fact that the majority of Israelis voted for a right-wing government demonstrate their awareness of that danger?

No. Efraim Inbar, a right-wing strategist, calls the Palestinians a "strategic nuisance"; you live with it. The violence is a problem, but more than that it generates a hostility against Israel, which Israelis tend to ignore, including the current government. They're focused on the violence, but not on the international repercussions. I think there is a shrugging off of this danger.

Do you think “shrugging it off” can be Israel’s response to that threat, precisely because they recognize international opposition? Could they be treading lightly regarding the Palestinians so as not to inflame worldwide criticism?

No. My sense is that on the predominant right-wing (the left-wing sentiment has essentially vanished, in the electorate anyhow), there is an indifference to this. They say let the world say what they want, we have what the world needs, we are strong, and we can ignore this, pretty much. I’m saying, no, you can’t ignore it because while Jeremy Corbyn did not become Prime Minister and Bernie Sanders did not become President, this view that they share is a powerful one and could well become government policy. Israel is in danger from this. It hasn’t happened yet but that doesn’t mean you can shrug it off.

What are Corbyn and Sanders interested in? One thing only — the circumstances of residents in Gaza, the West Bank, and Eastern Jerusalem. That needs to

be addressed and what I’m offering is a way to address it. If you can convince those residents that they’ve lost, then the international pressure will diminish.

Do you think Jew-hatred or self-hatred plays a role in this international pressure, which has morphed into calling Israel an “apartheid” state?

No, they’re different from the Muslims. Most of the non-Muslim toxic hatred of Israel is not that they want Israel to disappear. Sanders doesn’t want it to disappear. There is an element of hatred to be sure. I’m not denying that. But unlike the Muslim hostility towards Israel, which tends to be about the very existence of the state, leftist hostility tends to be about Israeli treatment of the Palestinians.

There’s an anger about this issue. For example, Gaza has been out from Israeli control since 2005, but it’s still portrayed as an open Arab prison of Israel. You have to scratch your head. And there are plenty of goods going back and forth from Gaza to Israel, which

Nasser Ishtayeh/Flash90

Palestinian rioters in the village of Kfar Qaddum, near Shechem, January 20.





Nasser Ishtayeh/Flash90
Palestinian rioters in
Shechem, December
30.

don't need to be. Israel is under no obligation to provide trade or anything else.

Antisemitism has to do with this, but I think no less important is anti-Western imperialism. "Apartheid" is not a coincidence. It's a word used by the Dutch descendants in South Africa. Israelis are seen as Europeans, never mind that many are not. The U.N. justifies it as decolonization. There's the sense that Israel is the last bastion of European colonialism and must be destroyed or transformed like South Africa. To have full Palestinian integration, you take away Judaism, the Law of Return, and Hebrew. To fight against this, Israel Victory needs to convince the Palestinians that they've lost. Not just in terms of violence, but no less important is the delegitimization that takes place in college campuses, international organizations and beyond.

How realistic is Israel Victory if much of the world supports the Palestinians and the U.S. still promotes the two-state solution?

That's not support for the Palestinians as such; that's giving them benefits in advance and hoping it will lead to good things. I wouldn't say the two-state solution, which, by the way I support, is by itself a bad idea. I support it in the sense of ultimately, when the Palestinians do accept Israel, then fine, they can have a state.

What practical measures would you recommend

to enforce this goal?

I have a whole bunch of practical measures, but I want to de-emphasize those because I'm not an Israeli nor a colonel nor do I think it's too helpful to get into the details. I want to establish the goal of victory, the goal of compelling the Palestinians to accept that Israel is there permanently.

Let me give you one illustration. Israel should tell the government of Gaza — Hamas — that a single rocket or missile coming over from there means one day without any water or food or medicine or energy. Two missiles will be two days. I think there will be a lot of anger towards Israel for this, but I think it will be effective and won't require military force. I think it's worth the criticism in order to convince the Palestinians that they've lost.

While this would actually exacerbate conflict on the world stage for Israel, which you said Israel needs to be mindful of, you think that in the long run it will be effective and therefore worthwhile?

Exactly. There is a tension between these two points. You're sharp to pick up on that. The international environment is extremely important in the long term, but in the short term, yes, take your chances and aggravate it. You don't have to worry about international opinion every moment; but yes, in the longer term, I think the

prospect of Sanders or even worse Corbyn-style leaders is real and needs to be addressed.

Do you think the Netanyahu government is on the right track with its punitive measures against the PA for their move at the U.N. to drag Israel to the International Court of Justice in an attempt at delegitimization?

I am impressed by several of the measures, particularly taking away privileges from the so-called PA foreign ministers, taking money away, and MK Smotrich saying he doesn't care if the PA exists or not. I generally like the approach but it needs to be put in context of the larger goal. These are just piecemeal policies. There used to be a goal of deterrence from 1948-1993. Then there was a goal of appeasement and land withdrawal. Now there's no goal.

But there is a long history of anti-Israel indoctrination among the Palestinians that's very hard to uproot. How do you change such a mindset?

In part through economic measures, by articulating it, by making trouble for the Hamas and PA. Israel has incredible power and a whole range of steps. It has to do it smartly, wisely, and tactically.

Instead of offering economic incentives like the Trump Peace Plan, you're suggesting the opposite — economic punitive measures?

Look what happened last year with Russia. Putin did something horrible. Look how the world reacted. It didn't offer new contracts and money. It cut off economic connections. Going back a century, the Zionist Socialists tried winning over the Palestinians with economic benefits, clean water, electricity, and plenty of food, and thought they would reconcile themselves to their presence. That didn't work. It didn't work in Oslo or the Trump plan. But it persists. Everybody says let's reward the Palestinians. I say no. Give them nothing, make them go through defeat, let them feel the pain. Then, once they've conceded, you can have Oslo-style agreements and benefits. It's completely illogical to benefit your enemy while you're at war with them. This is only an Israeli idea. The Marshall Plan only happened after the defeat of the Axis. We need to make them pay a price for continuing to want to eliminate the Jewish State. ■

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I believe that the annoyance of scratched CD's has become a universal problem, affecting every household where young children reside. In an effort to circumvent this problem, we bought a simple MP3 player and loaded all our CD's and cassettes onto that device.

The next step was to buy a portable speaker. The salesman in a local electronics store showed us the kosher options and we bought a simple speaker with a one-year warranty. For two exciting weeks, the kids listened to all their old favorites. Children's stories and cheerful songs wafted through the house, acting as a lively backdrop to the everyday comings and goings.

Until one day, the music abruptly came to a halt. The speaker didn't work, although it still looked brand-new and sat serenely on its perch, out of reach of little curious fingers.

I was quite confident in the one-year warranty that the company had included with the product, and I called them to register a complaint.

"Our new portable speaker doesn't work," I told the polite representative. "It was purchased two weeks ago, and is well within the limits of the warranty."

"I'll be glad to help you," the customer-service agent replied. "All you have to do is register a claim on our website, and you will receive a new speaker within four to six weeks. If you're ready, I'll give you the website information..."

"Uh, sir, that's not going to work for me," I interrupted him. "I don't have internet access."

Silence.

The agent was speechless, but he recovered his wits quite quickly and said, "That's not a problem. When you get access, you'll log into our website and submit your claim."

"Sir, you didn't understand," I said very slowly and clearly. "I don't have internet access. Not now, and not at any other time." Then, drawing on the many stories I had read in Smartvoice columns, I ventured, "Maybe I can submit the claim by fax? Could you send me a form that I can fill out?"

Another bout of silence, much longer than the first one. Finally, he said, "No, that's impossible. This isn't a form. It's a website. I can't print the website."

I swallowed my laughter at his befuddled reply. The speaker wasn't so expensive and I figured that I would chalk up the cost of a new one as a zechus for myself and my family. On the spur of the moment, I figured I'd give it one more shot.

"Why don't you ask your supervisor if he has a solution?" I suggested.

I spent three minutes listening to a recorded message about the company's fabulous customer service and product durability.

"Are you still there?" the agent asked. "We've never done this before, but my supervisor said that I can process the claim for you right now, as we speak."

I provided the information he requested: Name and address, product name and serial number, date of purchase...and that was it!

"Your claim has been processed," the agent informed me. "You will receive your new speaker shortly."

I didn't ask what 'shortly' means. After all, he had told me that it could take four to six weeks to get the new product.

I put the matter out of my mind, until a USPS parcel arrived at our doorstep precisely two days later! The new speaker had arrived, four weeks early! Apparently, when the agent processed my claim manually, he circumvented the red tape...showing me once again that Hashem is the One pulling the strings!

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