



Daniel Pipes

Explains 'Islamism'

BY DANIEL PIPES

I am delighted that *The Minaret's* editor has offered me an opportunity to write for his publication. I'll cover three topics: the reasons for my interest in Islam, my views of Islam and Islamism, and my work on Muslims in the United States.

About my interest in Islam: I have devoted a substantial part of the past 30 years to studying Islam and politics, beginning with the Arabic language, Muslim history, and related subjects in college. I then spent three years at university-level institutions in Cairo, traveled through much of the Muslim world, received a Ph.D. in Middle Eastern history at Harvard University, taught this subject at the University of Chicago and at Harvard, worked on it in the State and Defense Departments, wrote three books on it, published on it in such newspapers as *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, spoke about it on ABC, CBS, NBC, and CNN, testified before House and

Senate Committees, counseled foreign heads of state, and so forth.

In other words, I am recognized as an authority on Islam and Muslims; indeed, even my critics acknowledge this. For example, when the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), which has issued many press releases challenging my understanding of Islam, sought an authority to judge the credentials of a staff member of the House Task Force on Terrorism and Unconventional Warfare in its press release of March 17, 1998, whom did it quote? Me.

As a non-Muslim, I write primarily for fellow non-Muslims, helping them understand what is often a remote subject. My role is primarily one of explanation and interpretation, though I also try to help formulate correct policies.

This is what some call "applied scholarship:" taking academic knowledge and using it in practical ways.

Second, about my views of Islam and

Islamism: Not being a Muslim, I by definition do not believe in the mission of Prophet Muhammad; but I have enormous respect for the faith of those who do. I note how deeply rewarding Muslims find Islam as well as the extraordinary inner strength it imbues them with. Having studied the history and civilization of the classical period, I am vividly aware of the great Muslim cultural achievements of roughly a millennium ago.

I approach the religion of Islam in a neutral fashion, neither praising it nor attacking it but in a spirit of inquiry. Neither apologist nor booster, neither spokesman nor critic, I consider myself a student of this subject. I ask such questions as: What is the nature of Islam's principles, customs, and implications? How does the *sharia* (Islamic law) affect Muslim societies? Are there elements common to Muslim life from West Africa to Southeast Asia, yet absent elsewhere?

Though neutral on Islam, I take a strong stand on Islamism, which I see as very different. Islam is the religion of the Quran and the *Sunna* (example of the Prophet); Islamism is the political path of Hasan al-Banna, Abu'l-A'la al-Mawdudi, and Ayatollah Khomeini. The former is (in the Muslim view) eternal or

Islam is the religion of the Quran and the Sunna (example of the Prophet); Islamism is the political path of Hasan al-Banna, Abu'l-A'la al-Mawdudi, and Ayatollah Khomeini.

(in the non-Muslim view) fourteen centuries old; the latter is a twentieth-century phenomenon. The one is a faith, the other an ideology. Whereas the closest parallels to Islam are Judaism and Christianity, those closest to Islamism are other radical utopian "isms," namely fascism and Marxism-Leninism.

Islamism is a global affliction whose victims count peoples of all religions. Non-Muslims are losing their lives to it in such countries as Nigeria, Sudan, Egypt, and the Philippines. Muslims are the main casualties in Algeria, Turkey, Iran, and Afghanistan. Islamism is perhaps the most vibrant and coherent ideological movement in the world today; it threatens us all. Moderate Muslims and non-Muslims must cooperate to battle this scourge.

Third, I am currently working on Muslim life in the United States, a relatively new topic. Here are three conclusions to emerge from my research:

American Islam has enormous positive potential. Since encountering modernity two centuries ago, Muslims have had a difficult time figuring out how to adapt their religion to it. Kemal Ataturk of Turkey represents one school of thought – exclude Islam from every aspect of public life. The Taliban in Afghanistan represent the opposite extreme – subject every aspect of life to what are believed to be Islamic injunctions. There are plenty of other viewpoints between these two, such as those represented by the Ba'th Party, the Islamic Republic of Iran, and the Libyan *Jamahariya*.

American Muslims, who live at the very heart of modernity, may be able to make the grand reconciliation of Islam with modernity that has eluded their coreligionists elsewhere. If they do succeed at this, they could have a vast and highly beneficial impact on Muslim life around the world.

The Nation of Islam (NoI) is disappearing. The Nation of Islam is not just the organization headed currently by Louis Farrakhan but a complex body of institutions that since 1913 have gone by many names (Moorish Science Temple of America, Allah's Temple of Islam, Five Percenters, etc.) and featured a number of outsized personalities (Elijah Muhammad, Malcolm X, Muhammad Ali). The historic role of this institution is to create a substantial body of African-American converts to Islam (at present, they number about one million).

With the passage of time, the odd, folkloristic, and distinctly non-Islamic qualities of the NoI are fading. I predict that Farrakhan is its last leader with a national presence and that the organization is destined to disappear or to merge with real Islam.

American Islam faces a crisis of extremism. This is the issue that has brought my work to the attention of American Muslims and caused organizations like CAIR to accuse me of being an "Islamophobe" who promotes "anti-Muslim hysteria."

CAIR and the others reacted to my articles that warn Americans (including Muslims) that the main organizations of American Islam are Islamist. I hold that this spells trouble for Muslims and for the general American population.

Perhaps the most important area of conflict has to do with secularism: the Islamist agenda is overtly one of applying the *sharia* (Islamic law), even though this is in direct conflict with the

Constitution of the United States. Other major problems concern the Islamists' anti-Christian and anti-Jewish sentiments, their support for radical groups abroad, and their readiness to intimidate and to use violence.

Fortunately, Islamists constitute only a minority of Muslims living in the United States. Unfortunately, they dominate the mosques, schools, publications, and national organizations in this country. Worse, whenever a non-Islamist leader speaks up about this undue influence, the Islamists try to delegitimize him or silence him through threats.

The Islamists' approach is deeply antithetical to the American way and so, I predict, that as they and their work became better known, major problems will follow, and these will first of all affect the American Muslim population. My urgent hope is that moderate Muslims get involved in communal affairs and take interest in these matters, and so to redeem the Muslim institutions from the extremists' control.

I hope it is clear from the above that I am anything but an "Islamophobe." I wish this sort of name calling would come to a stop. Insisting that I am an enemy of Islam both insults me and complicates the lives of American Muslims (by suggesting that Islam has more enemies than in fact is the case).

Instead, I suggest to those who disagree with me that they reply in a respectful and serious manner to my arguments. I am prepared to engage in dialogue with those who unequivocally renounce violence and terrorist groups – starting with replies to this statement. ●

Daniel Pipes is director of the Middle East Forum.

Islamists constitute only a minority of Muslims living in the United States. Unfortunately, they dominate the mosques, schools, publications and national organizations in this country.

See The Minaret's response on page 38.

The Minaret's Response to Daniel Pipes:

The Politics of Intimidation

The Minaret asked Daniel Pipes to write an article about his views on Islam and Muslims. This does not mean that the magazine endorses his views. What it means is that as a fair and balanced Muslim media organization, the magazine is offering its readers opinions of those who have generally taken a negative approach to the Muslim community.

Pipes raises several issues that require serious comment. Identifying himself as a non-Muslim, Pipes argues that he writes primarily for fellow non-Muslims. In his words, "my role is primarily one of explanation and interpretation." However, this does not mean that his opinions or even his facts are correct. He has a subjective personal spin on events related with Muslims and Islam. *The Minaret* surveyed a number of non-Muslims in academic institutions and public life about Pipe's articles on Islam. Like many Muslims, they also saw a biased approach in interpreting events and even Muslim statements.

Pipes has coined the term "Islamism" as separate from Islam. He tries to justify the usage of the term as if it had a basis in reality. In his simple analysis, Muslims who are actively involved in public life while trying to shape their lives according to their beliefs are not the followers of Islam. Rather, they are Islamists.

Pipes suggests that those Muslims who adopt a confessional religion and are ritualistic and withdrawn from public life are the true followers of Islam. This assertion, as laughable as it may sound, needs to be discussed.

A large number of Muslims are inactive, but the active ones include those who lead Islamic centers and Muslim institutions. They are not a different species called Islamists. They are active Muslims. They have their own perspectives on issues. They have differences on their approach to understanding Islam.

Some are more observant of the values and standards

set by the faith and others may not be that faithful. In other words, they are not different from any other religious community including Jews or Christians. A great majority of active Muslims in America practice their faith with sincerity and honesty. They are good citizens and their views are respected in circles where they are active.

However, some people have made it their business to witch hunt for irresponsible statements made by a few people who intend to stain Muslim activists. This is neither accurate nor fair.

For instance, an orthodox rabbi recently stated that Holocaust victims paid for their sins and Arabs were snakes. Should we use this statement to stain Judaism and suggest that Jewish scriptures are racists? Such an approach is non-academic, non-scientific and above all non-Islamic.

Pipes' neutrality towards Islam is questionable. Publishing a substandard article as an academic piece to deny the credibility of Prophet Muhammad and negate the roots of Muslim history is not an example of an academic and analytical approach. It is an approach that proves Pipes' Islamophobic perception.

Pipes says that Muslims in America face a crisis of extremism. The fact of the matter is that Muslim Americans face a crisis of intimidation led by people like Pipes and many others.

The politics of intimidation is played in an environment of fear, stereotyping, suspicion and unconstitutional actions directed against the community and it will create a culture of violence against Muslims. Let us hope that Pipes is not representative of American academia and there are alternative voices about Islam and Muslims.

The Minaret welcome the discussion and want to take it to a higher level where people can talk substance and not accusations and allegations. ●

There is not a different species called 'Islamists.' They are active Muslims. They have their own perspectives on issues. They have differences on their approach to understanding Islam.