



Recruiting Soldiers Against Radical Islam

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Middle East scholar Daniel Pipes calls himself a "soldier" in the war against radical Islam. This description is in keeping with Pipes' belief that the "war's center of gravity has shifted from force of arms to the hearts and minds of citizens." Because so many people in the West still don't believe that they are at war, specialists like Pipes are performing an essential role by warning of the dangers of radical Islam.

The most recent battlefield in the war of ideas is Sinai Temple in Los Angeles, where Pipes spoke about "Radical Islam and the War on Terror" on March 29. Pipes, who is currently teaching a graduate seminar on "Islam & Politics" at Pepperdine University, began his talk by posing two questions that need to be answered before the West can even think about triumphing against the enemy it faces. Of course, to beat the enemy it is necessary to know the enemy, which is why the first question was: Who is the enemy?

The original answer to this question after September 11 was terrorism. Indeed, "War on Terror" became the standard way to refer to the greatest existential threat to face the West since the Cold War. But it must be remembered that terrorism is just a tactic. As Pipes made clear, we did not call World War II the "war against surprise attacks" in response to Pearl Harbor. Furthermore, if terrorism were the real enemy, non-Islamic terrorist groups such as the Shining Path in Peru would have to be mentioned by Western leaders more often than they are.

Does this mean that Muslims are the enemy? Pipes doesn't think so. Such a view is ahistorical: Islam has never been at such a low point as it is today. Viewing Islam as the problem also turns all Muslims into enemies, when, in fact, the West has Muslim allies. Here, Pipes mentioned the Algerians, who have been victims of radical Islamists during the last decade. In order to have achievable war aims, Pipes stressed the importance of creating secular goals. After all, the United States is not engaged in a crusade against Islam.

According to Pipes, the true enemy is not a religion but a political ideology called radical Islam. Radical Islamists believe that Islam is the answer to all the problems in the world. Put another way, radical Islam is the transformation of faith into a totalitarian ideology. Like fascism and communism before it, radical Islam seeks world hegemony. The rule of the Taliban in Afghanistan from 1996-2001 showed the nightmare that awaits the world if radical Islamists ever achieve their dream of applying Islamic law across the globe. A regime that banned the flying of kites and prevented women and girls from attending school is at odds with the principles of Western civilization. This is the reason why radical Islamists believe that a clash of civilizations is underway.

This clash is often expressed violently, whether it is through terrorism in New York or London, civil insurrection in Algeria, revolution in Iran or civil war in Afghanistan. But Pipes warned of a second wing of radical Islam that attempts to achieve its goals by working within the system. For example, the Egyptian terrorist group Al-Gama'a al-Islamiya renounced violence after its 1997 attack in Luxor which killed 57 tourists. This was a change of policy rather than a change of heart, as Al-Gama'a al-Islamiya believed it had a better chance of implementing its goals peacefully.

In Pipes' view, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan of Turkey is a greater threat to the world than Osama bin Laden. The latter's prospects have actually dimmed since September 11, while the former has the ability to make Turkey an Islamic state by promoting the Islamist agenda politically. Americans need to be aware of the non-violent wing of radical Islam. Groups like the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR)—which Pipes calls an indirect offspring of Hamas—and the Muslim Public Affairs Council share the same goals as the terrorists, even if their means of attaining them are different.

Pipes then moved on to the second question: What can we do about radical Islam? He believes that we need to overhaul the Muslim world like we did with the Soviet Union, Germany and Japan in the 20th century. A refrain that Pipes repeated throughout the night was "Defeat radical Islam, strengthen moderate Islam." Only by marginalizing the ideas of our enemies can we defeat them. Muslims can and need to play an important role in bringing this about. Today, isolated individuals live like moderate Muslims, but there is no mass movement of moderate Islam. Such a movement takes a great deal of money and organization, two things Muslims reformers don't yet have.

Pipes reminded his audience that since 1945, fascist ideas have not threatened the world. Similarly, 1991 saw the end of the powerful influence of Marxist-Leninist ideology. Pipes views the years 1945 and 1991 as bookends of the alternatives that face us now. He predicts

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that the current war will end somewhere in between the violence of 1945 and the non-violent collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

It won't end, however, until Western allies start seeing things on the same page. Pipes described the case of the Swiss scholar Tariq Ramadan, who has been banned from the United States because of his support for terrorism. Meanwhile, Ramadan was employed by Tony Blair's government to examine the roots of Islamic radicalism after the London bombings of July 7. Western countries need to develop similar strategies and show solidarity if they are ever going to be able to deal successfully with issues like Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons.

While the West no longer faces a powerful state like the Soviet Union or Germany (a nuclear Iran would change this), there are probably over 150 million Islamists today. This number is greater than all the communists and fascists who ever lived. Moreover, radical Islam is a utopian movement that has a powerful body of ideas to offer. Proof of this can be found in the increasing number of Western converts to radical Islam. Thus, it is dangerous to view terrorism in cynical terms or--like John Kerry--to call it simply a nuisance akin to gambling or prostitution. Even worse is not to think about radical Islam at all. Pipes said that most of the Republican presidential candidates seem to be deeply affected by the threat radical Islam poses to the United States. The Democratic candidates, meanwhile, hardly seem to mention it at all.

Pipes ended his talk with a list of things people can do to counter the threat: Learn about and research the subject, write letters to the editor or opinion pieces, get active in politics and organizations, and talk to people. In other words, they can join Pipes by becoming informed and, in turn, informing others in the war against radical Islam.

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