

Book Review: Militant Islam Reaches America

Reviewed by John Haines

MILITANT ISLAM REACHES AMERICA, Daniel Pipes, W.W. Norton & Company, 2003, 2002.

On reading the title, one might expect another tongue lashing of Muslims by one who has no sympathy and little knowledge of these people. I was pleasantly surprised to find that this is not the case. The author, director of the Middle East forum, is also a columnist for the *New York Post* and *The Jerusalem Post*. The *Wall Street Journal* calls him 'an authoritative commentator on the Middle East.' He taught history at Harvard and also taught at the US naval war college. (For more about him, consult his website: www.DanielPipes.org.)

In his introduction, he mentions the well-known statement by President Bush about Islam being a religion that 'teaches peace.' Pipe's basic thesis is that there is a distinction between Islam and what might be called Islamism, which he names 'militant Islam'. It is this segment of the Muslim world that has an agenda of terror and infiltration, as illustrated by events in Europe, North America and the Far East. These he carefully documents in what might be one of the fullest footnote collections of existing books on the subject! Pipes did his homework. He sums up his position thus: 'As a non-Muslim, I write primarily for fellow non-Muslims, helping them understand what is often a remote

subject'. He adds, 'Though neutral on Islam, I take a strong stand of militant Islam, which I see as very different, and which forms a central subject of this book. I see militant Islam as a global affliction whose victims count peoples of all religions' (*Introduction*, xii-xiii).

Several helpful insights come to my mind as I review my long and careful reading of this book of 326 pages. First, he rejects a popular thesis that the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 has led to what some might call the Green Peril of Islam. A second insight, revolutionary in my mind, is his careful documentation of the fact that the majority of terrorists on our North American scene do not come from poor masses that have no other hope. Many, for example, have had studies in engineering and medicine.

The author underlines a disturbing fact that I had never really faced: many converts to Islam in the United States, black or white, rich or poor, have come to hate their own country. I confess that before finishing the book, I skipped ahead at one point to his chapter 22, 'The Curious Case of Jamil Al-Amin'.

Here we see the man who was once known as H. Rap Brown, a firebrand of the violent left. He was 'Minister of Justice' for the Black Panther Party. His jailhouse conversion took place in 1971 through an African-American group, and at that time, he changed

his name and went on a pilgrimage to Mecca. He became what Pipes calls the 'Darling of the Islamic Establishment.' He was closely allied with CAIR [Council on American-Islamic Relations], a very influential Muslim group located in Washington. Yet in 2002, armed to the teeth, he murdered one of two African-American sheriff's deputies who were sent to serve a warrant for his arrest. The story of this man's life illustrates both the hatred that a militant Muslim can have for his own country and the way in which some Islamic organizations use a case like this – and others – to claim that Muslims in the United States are denied their rights. This ploy, in North America and in Europe, can shroud the true nature of some – thankfully few – violent professors of Islam. I know. I talked to a few of them in their prison cells in France not long ago.

I found the author very helpful in his careful documentation of chapter 15, 'Are American Muslims the Victims of Bias?' He cites, for example, the case of a Minnesota high school teacher. She was reassigned to another school for expressing her dislike of Muslim modesty practices. 'One misstep and she's gone,' an official warned. To the point also is the case of how Burger King acted when a basketball player named Rasheed praised the bacon-laden Whopper in one of their ads! The company was obliged to modify their advertising.

What of the use of Arabic for decoration? CAIR contended that the

logo on Nike basketball shoes could 'be interpreted' as the word 'Allah'. Nike said that the logo was intended to look like flames. The threat of worldwide boycott made them withdraw the shoe. Nike, in repentance, studied Islam, sponsored events, donated Nike products, as well as \$50,000 to an Islamic centre in Northern Virginia. Some Muslims have shown great legal and political acumen for exploiting a system that gives them freedom they would never have found in their countries of origin.

Finally, Daniel Pipes's book, along with some other reading of late, helped me to understand the history and nature of Black Islam in the United States. See, for example, his chapter 21, 'The Rise of Elijah Muhammad'. Islam in America is not at all the Islam of the young Muslim men and women that some of us have known in Europe. We need to understand this special group of American people in the light of their historic needs, as well as the special factors that led to their embracing Islam. One former veteran worker in the Middle East told me that African-American Muslims are often Muslim only in a very surface manner. His African-American church ministers to many of that persuasion.

My wife and I visited Washington just before this year's anniversary of 9/11. In fact, we both gave seminars on Islam on 11 September in a large suburb of Washington, in a church that we did not know well. The next day, in the company of our host, a

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former French naval officer, we drove by the Pentagon on the way to visit museums just off the Mall. This was our first eleventh of September in our home country. How do we react to such events? What role did the Islam of the Qur'an, of Muhammad and of history play?

Pipes aids us in being realists. The Scripture and personal contact with Muslims around us will help us go one step further: to experience God's great purpose of salvation for the followers of Muhammad and the religion of the Qur'an.

