

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.

However, “though neutral on Islam,” he continues, “I take a strong stand on Islamism, which I see as very different....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 scourge, a global affliction whose victims include peoples of all religions, [but] Muslims are the main casualties....Moderate Muslims who wish to live modern lives, unencumbered by burqas, fatwas, and violent visions of jihad, are on the defensive and atomized. They must be helped: celebrated by governments, publicized in the media, given grants by foundations.” Many of Pipes’s articles deal with the plight of moderate voices in Islam, and he says MEF is in the process of helping form an anti-Islamist Muslim organization.

Nonetheless, Pipes has a knack for arousing bilious emotions. A world-class free-for-all was detonated in the spring of 2003 when President Bush nominated him to the board of the U.S. Institute of Peace (USIP), a rather obscure deliberative body, a nomination requiring Senate approval. What happened?

The *Washington Post* editorialized that the nomination was a “cruel joke,” pointing out that the institute was supposed to be working on a special initiative to create a bridge between cultures, but “Mr. Pipes has long been regarded by Muslims as a destroyer of such bridges.” The Arab American Institute, an activist policy organization headed by James Zogby, released a statement saying, in part, “For decades Daniel Pipes has displayed a bizarre obsession with all things Arab and Muslim. Now, it appears that his years of hatred and bigotry have paid off with a presidential appointment. One shudders to think how he will abuse this position to tear at the fabric of our nation.” Juan Cole blogged, “I urge academics and others to boycott the United States Institute for Peace this year, as long as extremist ideologue Daniel Pipes serves on it.” But by far the most acrimonious sustained attack came from the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR). The *New Republic* reported:

Go to the [CAIR] website...and you will see an urgent call to “Act Now! Ask Senate to reject the Daniel Pipes Nomination.” Elsewhere on the site, another “Action Alert” beckons you to ask the president “to rescind nomination of ‘Islamophobe’”

Robert Spencer, author of several books on Islam, and director of the websites Jihad Watch and Dhimmi Watch, did go to the CAIR website and called it a “lynching.” According to a *Wall Street Journal* editorial,

In fighting the war on terror, it would be nice to think there is a role for one of the few U.S. scholars to warn of the danger from militant Islam in advance of September 11. Instead, the nomination of Mideast scholar Daniel Pipes to the board of the U.S. Institute of Peace has turned into one of the nastier confirmation battles of the Bush Presidency....For years Mr. Pipes has been raising the alarm about Islamic terrorist organizations operating in the U.S....After 9/11 he made the obvious point that the best hiding place for radical Muslims in the U.S. would be in moderate Muslim communities and in mosques. He favors “profiling,” which is to say paying more attention at airports to young Arab men than to American grandmothers....For these insights, Mr. Pipes is now being dubbed a “racist” and a “bigot”...The Council on American-Islamic Relations is leading the charge, calling Mr. Pipes’s appointment “a slap in the face to all those who seek to build bridges of understanding between people of faith.”

Questions for a Friend

Adapted from an article by Pipes that ran in the Jerusalem Post on November 26, 2003

IF MILITANT ISLAM is the problem and moderate Islam is the solution, as I often argue, how does one differentiate between these two forms of Islam?

It is often useful to ask questions. Such questions might include:

Violence: Do you condone or condemn the Palestinians, Chechens, and Kashmiris who give up their lives to kill enemy civilians? Will you condemn by name as terrorist groups such organizations as Abu Sayyaf, Al-Gama’a al-Islamiyya, Group Islamique Armée, Hamas, Harakat ul-Mujahidin, Hizbullah, Islamic Jihad, Jaish e-Mohammed, Lashkar-e-Tayyiba, and al-Qaida?

Modernity: Should Muslim women have equal rights with men (for example, in inheritance shares or court testimony)? Is jihad, meaning a form of warfare, acceptable in today’s world? Do you accept the validity of other religions? Do Muslims have anything to learn from the West?

Secularism: Should non-Muslims enjoy completely equal civil rights with Muslims? May Muslims convert to other religions? May Muslim women marry non-Muslim men? Do you accept the laws of a majority non-Muslim government and unreservedly pledge allegiance to that government? Should the state impose religious observance, such as banning food service during Ramadan? When Islamic customs conflict with secular laws...which should give way?

Islamic Pluralism: Are Sufis and Shi’ites fully legitimate Muslims? Do you see Muslims who disagree with you as having fallen into unbelief? Is *takfir* (condemning fellow Muslims with whom one has disagreements as unbelievers) an acceptable practice?

Self-criticism: Do you accept the legitimacy of scholarly inquiry into the origins of Islam? Who was responsible for the 9/11 suicide hijackings?

Defense against militant Islam: Do you accept enhanced security measures to fight militant Islam, even if this means extra scrutiny of yourself? Do you agree that institutions accused of funding terrorism should be shut down?

Goals in the West: Do you accept that Western countries are majority-Christian and secular or do you seek to transform them into majority-Muslim countries ruled by Islamic law?

These questions offer a good start to the vexing issue of separating enemy from friend.