

After the Hamas election win

Daniel Pipes denounces democracy for Muslims

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In the aftermath of Hamas's victory in the Palestinian legislative election on January 25, right-wing columnist Daniel Pipes has called for the Bush administration to suspend further elections in the Middle East until it can be assured that their outcome will favour US interests.

In a particularly crude fashion, Pipes has expressed the thinking of many foreign policy officials in Washington. Hamas's win has sparked a debate within US ruling circles over the implications of the Bush administration's rhetorical expressions of support for democracy within the Middle East.

Pipes's piece, "Democracy's bitter fruit", was published in Canada's *National Post* on January 27, and reprinted in the *Australian* on January 30 under the headline, "Region not ripe for democracy".

The column advised the Bush administration to "[t]ake heed that an impatience to move the Middle East to democracy is consistently backfiring by bringing our most deadly enemies to power", and to "appreciate stability, [which] must not be an end in itself, but its absence likely leads to anarchy and radicalisation."

Pipes is director of the Middle East Forum, a right-wing think tank which promotes the use of militarism to serve US and Israeli interests in the region. The organisation backed the war in Iraq, and has previously called for military action against Syria. Pipes also heads Campus Watch, a McCarthyist-style organisation which targets academics in American universities critical of Israeli and US policies in the Middle East. The columnist is notorious for his hostility to Muslims and his defence of Israeli aggression against the Palestinian people.

Pipes is no isolated right-wing demagogue. He has close ties with sections of the Republican Party. In November 2001 he was appointed to the Special Task Force on Terrorism Technology, sponsored by the Department of Defense, and in 2003 President Bush selected the columnist to work with the US Institute of Peace.

Pipes begins his piece on the Palestinian elections by echoing the Bush administration's claim that it is advancing democracy and fighting terrorism in the Middle East. He writes, "with Washington in the lead, virtually every Western government adopted a two-prong approach to solving the problems of the Middle East". The "negative" prong is the fight against terrorism, while the "positive" one is the promotion of democracy.

In reality, both the open-ended "war on terror" and Washington's push for "democracy" in the Middle East are the means through which the US is advancing its imperialist aims in the region. The September 11 terrorist attacks were seized upon to launch previously established plans to invade Afghanistan and Iraq in order to control critical energy resources in the region and bolster America's position against its rivals in Europe and Asia.

The Bush administration's promotion of "liberty" and "democracy" in the region was first employed to provide an *ex post facto* justification of its illegal invasion of Iraq after its lies about Iraq's weapons of mass destruction were thoroughly exposed. It now serves to provide a pretext for US aggression against targeted states around the world, irrespective of whether they can be shown to pose any terrorist or security risk.

The cynicism of Washington's claim to be promoting democracy in the region has been demonstrated on a number of occasions. The fraudulent elections staged in Afghanistan and Iraq under the oversight of US occupying forces have been hailed as models of democracy, while Hamas's victory in Palestine was immediately denounced as illegitimate.

For Pipes, however, the problem is not the hypocrisy of the Bush administration's strategy, but rather its efficacy. He notes that a number of recent elections have produced unfavourable outcomes for the US. "The first functional election in the Palestinian Authority has thrown up Hamas," he writes. "In December, 2005, the Egyptian electorate came out strongly for the Muslim Brotherhood, a radical Islamic

party, and not for liberal elements. In Iraq, the post-Saddam electorate voted in a pro-Iranian Islamist as prime minister. In Lebanon, the voters celebrated the withdrawal of Syrian troops by voting Hezbollah into the government. Likewise, radical Islamic elements have prospered in elections in Saudi Arabia and Afghanistan.”

Pipes complains that unlike in Germany and Japan after World War II, elections in the Middle East are not bringing pro-American parties to power. “It’s not Islam or some cultural factor that accounts for this difference; rather, it is the fact that ideological enemies in the Middle East have not yet been defeated,” he writes. “Democratisation took place in Germany, Japan, and the Soviet Union after their populations had endured the totalitarian crucible. By 1945 and 1991, they recognised what disasters fascism and communism had brought them, and were primed to try a different path. That’s not the case in the Middle East, where a totalitarian temptation remains powerfully in place.”

It is not the place here to unravel all of the historical distortions, falsifications and amalgams contained within this short passage. Suffice it to say that what Pipes finds attractive in the examples of Japan and Germany is the use of military force to obtain US objectives. As for the Stalinist regime in Soviet Union—which had nothing to do with communism—the standard view of anti-communists like Pipes is that the aggressive US arms buildup in the 1980s was decisive in forcing its collapse and conditioning the population for “democratisation”.

Pipes’s insistence that Russia has now been democratised reveals the real meaning of his contrast between “totalitarianism” and “democracy”. Led by the authoritarian President Vladimir Putin, Russia is now dominated by a tiny layer of billionaire oligarchs who enriched themselves through the looting of the Soviet Union’s state economy. For Pipes, “democracy” has nothing to do with the democratic rights of ordinary people but rather is synonymous with the dominance of a market economy and the establishment of a political system which sustains capitalist relations and is amenable to American interests.

Pipes complains that “ideological enemies in the Middle East have not yet been defeated”. He goes on to demand that the Bush administration work to defeat “radical Islam”, insisting that only “when Muslims see that this is a route doomed to failure will they be open to alternatives”.

In other words, Pipes is demanding Palestinian society to be brought to its knees. Hamas’s election victory represents—albeit in a distorted form—an expression of the Palestinian people’s ongoing resistance to the Israeli occupation. For Pipes, the priority for the US and Israel must be to crush this popular defiance.

The Islamists’ win was not due to the temptation of

totalitarianism, but was a protest by the Palestinian people against their existing leaders, Israeli oppression and the so-called peace process. Disillusionment and disgust with the corruption and cowardice of Fatah and the Palestinian Authority (PA), headed by President Mahmoud Abbas, now dominates popular sentiment in the West Bank and Gaza.

The “peace process” has seen ongoing Israeli settlement expansion in East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza, and countless Israeli military raids in the Occupied Territories—including the assassination of militants, demolition of homes, and bombing and strafing of civilian areas. Israel’s separation wall has been used to illegally annexe a large swathe of the West Bank, and to cut off East Jerusalem from any other Palestinian area. The PA’s prostration before Israel and the imperialist powers has produced nothing but failed hopes, corruption, and deepening impoverishment for ordinary Palestinians. Despite all this, the population remains unwilling to submit to Israeli and US demands. In Pipes’s view, this is what must be changed.

“Western capitals need to show Palestinians that—like Germans electing Hitler in 1933—they have made a decision gravely unacceptable to civilized opinion,” he writes. “The Hamas-led Palestinian Authority must be isolated and rejected at every turn, thereby encouraging Palestinians to see the error of their ways.”

Once again we have a convenient rewriting of history. It should be noted in the first place that the coming to power of the Nazis was in fact widely welcomed by bourgeois governments in the US and Europe as a bulwark against the threat of socialist revolution in Europe.

Pipes’s demand that the Palestinians be “encouraged to see the error of their ways” is a euphemism for the US and European powers to bludgeon the impoverished people of the West Bank and Gaza into submission. An embargo on all foreign funding for Palestinian institutions, currently under consideration by the US and EU, would have a devastating effect on the Occupied Territories. Pipes’s column is a blunt argument for this and harsher methods to cow the Palestinian people.



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