

'Who Killed Daniel Pearl?'

TO MANY OUTSIDE FRANCE, BERNARD-HENRI Lévy is the elegant caricature of a libertine Left Bank intellectual. But he also harbors a deep-rooted concern about the dangers of extremism—in all its shapes and forms—which has led him to a project stirring controversy on both sides of the Atlantic. Lévy learned about the murder of Wall Street Journal reporter

Daniel Pearl while visiting Afghanistan as French President Jacques Chirac's special envoy in January 2002. He spent the next year in Pakistan, India, Europe and the United States trying to uncover why Pearl's captors held and executed him. The resulting book, "Who Killed Daniel Pearl?," released in the United States this month, argues that Al Qaeda and radicals in the Pakistani military and intelligence services have been working together to gain access to Pakistan's nuclear arsenal. Pearl's sin, Lévy concludes, was that he got too close to those plans. NEWSWEEK's Marie Valla and Eric Pape interviewed Lévy last week. Excerpts:

NEWSWEEK: You just returned from the United States. Tell us about the differences in the way the book was received there and in France.

LEVY: In the States, the book's reception was a lot more intense and emotional. American journalists carry the death of Pearl in themselves like an open wound. In France, Pearl is someone whose name people hardly remembered. In the United States, it's as if I was coming to tell people about [the story of] one of their relatives, a brother, a son or a best friend. I gave an interview to the first newspaper Pearl ever worked for. The journalist and I were both moved to tears. Fifteen months after Pearl's body was repatriated, I felt like I was bringing back a tiny fragment of his memory.

Why did you write such a personal book about a man you never met?

I was shaken by Daniel Pearl's death. Then, as I was investigating it, I grew more and more attached to what he stood for. I have written about 30 books now, but I never felt shaken up the way I did after I wrote this book. It shattered me, for reasons that I myself don't completely understand. I would never have been able to behave the

way he did in captivity or to face death like he did. There is something both grand and beautiful in the way he rejected a war of civilizations, in his desire to communicate with adversaries and in his longing to understand the hatred of others.

When did you realize it would be necessary to introduce a form that would allow for fictional elements in the telling of the story?

I knew I would write the book in that particular form when I went back to the scene of the crime, the place where he was beheaded. It was when I found myself

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stuck between these four walls, alone in that room, with the bloodstain on the wall, the piece of rope—all the little remnants of a life that had vanished. At that very moment I realized that there were two things that I had to do: reconstruct the story of Pearl's death and take his investigation a few steps further, not to finish it but to pick up its threads.

So who killed Daniel Pearl—and why?

A crime syndicate made up of several Pakistani groups who are leading jihads, and who are backed by the ISI—Pakistan's secret services—and supported by organizations linked to Al Qaeda. They wanted, first of all, to set an example, to send a message



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to Westerners about how they would now be treated; secondly, to embarrass [Pakistani President Pervez] Musharraf, and thirdly, to stop Pearl, who was a good journalist, from exposing certain truths that elements in Pakistan wanted kept secret.

When you finished the book, the United States was about to launch a war against Iraq. How did that relate to the terrorism that you were writing about?

That's exactly the problem—I don't see how they relate. This is why I believe that the war against Iraq was a mistake, because the path of antiterrorism doesn't go through Baghdad. And I haven't changed my mind about this since I said in February that the war is "morally right but politically wrong." It's always right to bring down dictators, but politically and as far as fighting terrorism was concerned, it wasn't a good move.

You have written previously of the dangers of guiding politics with moral purity.

The [desire] for purity is the matrix of all terrorism. It was true of fascism—purity of the race. It was true of communism—purity of the good society. And it is true of a third type of fascism—[Islamic] fascism, which longs for an impeccable world devoid of sin and corruption. It's the basic concept that runs through the [20th] century and embraces all the different strains of modern totalitarianism. At the root of all genocidal madness in the last century, there is this fantasy of a pure community or a pure race.

You call yourself an "anti-anti-American." Can you explain?

Any argument that jointly dismisses Bush and bin Laden is garbage—however strongly you may disagree with Bush. I am against people who criticize America for what it is, rather than for what it does.