

# PUBLISHERS WEEKLY

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## WHO KILLED DANIEL PEARL?

BERNARD-HENRI LÉVY, TRANS. FROM THE FRENCH BY JAMES X. MITCHELL. *Meville House* (IPC, dist.), \$25.95 (470p) ISBN 0-9718659-4-9

★ Ostensibly an investigation into the murder of *Wall Street Journal* reporter Daniel Pearl, this ends up being a much more ambitious account of the nefarious complicity of factions as varied as the Pakistan's ISI (the secret service), regional Islamist groups, a wealthy landowner, Pearl defendant Omar Sheikh and al-Qaida. It's a gripping read, as full of suspenseful twists as of bold and occasionally loose theories. At their root is Sheikh, the English-bred Pakistani radical who was convicted of masterminding the Pearl crime. But this conviction, in the author's fast-moving mind, is far from an open-and-shut case, and Lévy follows up his preliminary conclusion that "the affair contained a heavy and terrible secret." What that secret is grows and changes, but in the final analysis it comes down to Sheikh being an operative of both the ISI and al-Qaida and then taking the fall for both at the trial. Pearl, Lévy argues, was killed not for who he was, but because of what he had discovered. The conclusions, however, are in a sense less important than the ride that gets us there. The author's moments of gonzo journalism are thrilling, as when he penetrates a forbidden *madrassa* (seminary) by posing as "a special representative of the French president." The earlier passages of the book, which take some literary license in describing what Pearl must have felt, is alone worth the price of admission. This book is a controversial bestseller in France, where Lévy has long been a leading philosopher and writer. Here, interest in Pearl and the larger issues makes this both fascinating and essential, even if you don't quite buy it all, and a credit to the investigative reporter whose work it seeks to honor. (Sept. 3)

**Forecast:** *This could be a big book for a small press. The author is booked on the Today show and Fox and Friends, for interviews with New York magazine and the L.A. Times, and reviews are confirmed for several major newspapers.*

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PWTalks with Bernard-Henri Lévy

## In Daniel Pearl's Footsteps

**PW:** Your book *Who Killed Daniel Pearl?* [reviewed on p. 51] makes the bombshell suggestion that the Pakistani secret service is very culpable in Daniel Pearl's murder. How concerned are you that, when it comes to violence against Westerners, this isn't the last we'll hear from Pakistan?

**Bernard-Henri Lévy:** I come back from this investigation convinced that Pakistan is the most problematic country in the world. They are the most rogue of the rogue states. They have not only the weapons, but the ideology. They have a lot of strong and enthusiastic jihadists plotting the transfer of nuclear weapons to Islamist groups, and they have a lot of government scientists convinced that what they do belongs to the Islamist groups. You have this nowhere else, not in Iran or Iraq or Libya or North Korea.

**PW:** Do you think countries like the U.S. could be taking a harder line?

**BHL:** We act as if by controlling [Pakistani Prime Minister] Musharraf, we control Pakistan. It's very naïve. The Pakistani situation is much more confused, the illness is much more deep, the rot is much deeper than we think.

**PW:** You've seen a lot of different murderous forces in your long career. Whom does the current network of terrorist groups most remind you of?

**BHL:** There are a few. For the ideology, the Khmer Rouge. Their religious fundamentalism, their idea of purifying humanity of its evil parts—this is in Islamic fundamentalism. For the way of fighting, it's the Tamil Tigers—they both are very interested in chemical weapons and of course both use human bombs. For the strategy, the former Communist movement—the strong, clandestine and nearly Bolshevik core of al-Qaida itself, with all the cells that are connected to it but don't really have a close link.

**PW:** You seem to suggest in the book that Daniel Pearl's captors would have been willing to let him go had he not told them what he knew. Which means that, in a sense, Pearl may have sealed his own fate. Is that your opinion?

**BHL:** There is one responsibility, one fault, in the death of Daniel

Pearl, and that is the fault of the jihadists. If he had not spoken so much, they would have found another reason to kill him. I just described the way these things happened in these six or seven days that he was being held.

**PW:** But it's a bit of a contradiction, isn't it—the idea that this killing was both a result of a highly premeditated terrorist effort and a random act of barbarism?

**BHL:** Daniel Pearl did his job, and every journalist who does his job is in danger. Daniel Pearl was a great reporter, and in a way, he paid the price. He was indeed (in the words of Musharraf) "overintrusive"—but it's every journalist's job to be overintrusive.

**PW:** Your book is already a bestseller in France. What are you hoping for with its American publication?

**BHL:** It is my hope that when Adam Pearl is of reading age this book will contribute to his understanding of what happened to his father. What I hope also is that a lot of Americans know what a great American Daniel Pearl was, what a great journalist they lost and what kind of risks journalists take. I'm not sure they always realize this. And lastly, I hope people will realize it's a European who wrote this book, and that the gap between America and Europe is not as strong as our presidents seem to think it is. My book is a declaration of friendship to the Anglo-Saxon world.

**PW:** And to the Pearls, too, it would seem.

**BHL:** Yes, it is a tribute. I feel so close to Daniel Pearl. As I say in the book, I consider him my posthumous friend.

**PW:** You did a lot of Pearl-style investigation yourself, going on your own into an alien culture where you didn't speak the language or know all of the terrain. Were you ever concerned about safety, or that you were being overintrusive yourself?

**BHL:** Overintrusive is not a reproach. It is our duty as journalists to be overintrusive, so I tried to be overintrusive. I tried also to be careful. I suppose I was, since I'm still here to talk to you about it.



—STEVEN ZEITCHIK