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Death of the man who knew too much

The Wall Street Journal reporter Daniel Pearl was cynically murdered because he got too close to the truth of 9/11, says the French philosopher Bernard Levy. By Iltyd Harrington

Who Killed Daniel Pearl? by Bernard-Henri Levy
 Duckworth £20

WELL, according to Bernard-Henri Levy, hereafter known as BHL, it was three professional Yemeni assassins, one decapitated him, and two held him. Someone else videoed the appalling three-minute and 16 second process. But the question is, why?

It was the early morning of January 31, 2002. Daniel Pearl was a highly regarded reporter for the Wall Street Journal in Pakistan. He was young, clever and persistent, and a Jew. His wife was expecting their second child.

In the murky and dangerous world of Pakistan, and its ISL - Inter-State Services Intelligence - Pearl had followed leads on the real significance of Richard C Reid, the South London convert to Islam, who had tried to blow up an American passenger airline.

This was the Shoe Bomber. Pearl sought his handlers and on January 23, 2002, the breakthrough came. His shadowy contacts led him to a house in Karachi. His investigation appears to have been too penetrative for he was very near to establishing a link between the ISL, Al-Qaeda the Taliban, sellers of enriched uranium - two Pakistani nuclear scientists who were

advising on the construction of a dirty bomb within Afghanistan.

BHL is not a modest man. He is aged 55, married to a leading French film actress, handsome, living in style on the Left Bank and well-connected.

He had an outdated diplomatic passport from President Chirac and continued to use it as he set out to follow Pearl's footsteps, his method is part novel, but in the main investigative.

A fellow Jew, he courted danger but his connections, informants and nerve make for a convincing but disturbing pursuit of the Truth.

Enter Omar Cheik, a key player in the daily game of intrigue, and who BHL casts as the cold, treacherous author of Daniel Pearl's brutal death.

This is no mad-eyed mullah, but the unlikely head boy of a smart private school in Essex, a school that produced Peter Greenaway, the film director, the actor Adam Woodyatt and the

English cricket captain Nassar Hussein.

Omar was born in Whipps Cross Hospital on December 23 1973.

His father, who came from Lahore, owns Perfect Fashion in Wandstead and a brother, Awais, managed an outlet in Commercial Road, E1. Awais went to Cambridge and studied law, his sister to Oxford. Omar ended up in the London School of Economics and spent many of his evenings arm-wrestling in London and provincial pubs.

He had a passion for chess and loved flowers. On one occasion he startled a fellow student by proposing they kidnap the Indian High Commissioner. BHL made five trips to Pakistan, even getting into Binore

Town, the Islamic Vatican.

He went twice to India and the USA and the UK. And once to Bosnia and Dubai. No one now seriously challenges that the money before and after September 11, 2001, the day of the attack on the World Trade Centre, moving from the Emirates was billions rather than millions. Omar was now a man of many names as well as many parts. BHL claims that Osama Bin Laden called him "a most favoured son".

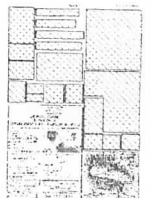
It is alleged here that General Ahmad Mohmood, the former chief of

Pakistan's Secret Service was a financial conduit. He had links to the General after he was one of three exchanged for 155 hijacked Indian passengers from an Air India aircraft.

The Essex schoolboy had arrived in a ruthless and threatening world. He was charged eventually with the murder and after a three-month trial in July, 2002, he was found guilty and sentenced to be hanged in Hyderabad. He has made an appeal.

Pearl was not murdered for being a Jew, he was the Man who Knew Too Much, he paid a terrible price.

But like BHL he believed in a gentle Islam, in spite of what some of its practitioners claim in this fragile part of this uneasy world.



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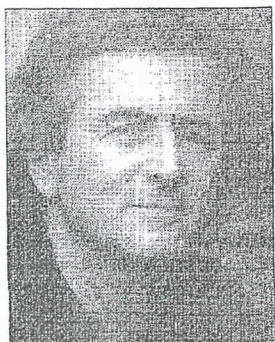


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Bernard-Henri Levy



Top, Daniel Pearl photographed in captivity by his captors days before his murder. Above, the tenacious and highly regarded reporter