



Inside the Islamic Mafia

Bernard-Henri Lévy exposes Daniel Pearl's killers.

By Christopher Hitchens

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I remember laughing out loud, in what was admittedly a mirthless fashion, when Khalid Sheikh Muhammad, one of Osama Bin Laden's most heavy-duty deputies, was arrested in Rawalpindi, Pakistan. Straining to think of an apt comparison, I fail badly. But what if, say, the Unabomber had been found hiding out in the environs of West Point or Fort Bragg? Rawalpindi is to the Pakistani military elite what Sandhurst is to the British, or St Cyr used to be to the French. It's not some boiling slum: It's the manicured and well-patrolled suburb of the officer class, very handy for the capital city of Islamabad if you want to mount a coup, and the site of Flashman's Hotel if you are one of those who enjoys the incomparable imperial adventure-stories of George MacDonald Fraser. Who, seeking to evade capture, would find a safe house in such a citadel?

Yet, in the general relief at the arrest of this outstanding thug, that aspect of the matter drew insufficient attention. Many words of praise were uttered, in official American circles, for the exemplary cooperation displayed by our gallant Pakistani allies. But what else do these allies have to trade, except al-Qaida and Taliban suspects, in return for the enormous stipend they receive from the U.S. treasury? Could it be that, every now and then, a small trade is made in order to keep the larger trade going?

One hesitates to utter thoughts like these, but they recur continually as one reads Bernard-Henri Lévy's latest book: *Who Killed Daniel Pearl?* Everybody remembers—don't they?—the ghastly video put out on the Web by Pearl's kidnappers and torturers. It's the only live-action footage we possess of the ritual slaughter of a Jew, preceded for effect by his coerced confession of his Jewishness. Pearl was lured into a trap by the promise of a meeting with a senior religious demagogue, who might or might not have shed light on the life of the notorious

"shoe-bomber," because of whom millions of us must take off our footwear at American airports every day, as if performing the pieties required for entering a mosque.

What a sick joke all this is, if you study Lévy's book with care. If you ever suspected that the Pakistani ISI (or Interservices Intelligence) was in a shady relationship with the Taliban and al-Qaida forces, this book materializes the suspicion and makes the very strong suggestion that Pearl was murdered because he was doing his job too well, not because he was a naïve idealist who got into the wrong car at the wrong time. His inquiries had at least the potential for exposing the Pakistani collusion and double-dealing with jihad forces, in much the same pattern the Saudi Arabian authorities have been shown to follow—by keeping two sets of books, in other words, and by exhibiting only one set to Americans.

Like a number of those who take a moral stand on this, Bernard-Henri Lévy was a strong defender of Bosnia's right to exist, at a time when that right was being menaced directly by Serbian and Croatian fascists. It was a simplification to say that Bosnia was "Muslim," but it would also have been a simplification to say that the Bosnians were not Muslims. The best resolution of this paradox was to assert that Bosnia-Herzegovina stood for ethnic and cultural pluralism, and to say that one could defend Islam from persecution while upholding some other important values at the same time. I agree with M. Lévy that it was a disgrace at the time, and a tragedy in retrospect, that so few Western governments took this opportunity.

But now we hear, from those who were indifferent to that massacre of Muslims, or who still protest the measures that were taken to stop the massacre, that it is above all necessary for the West to be aware of Islamic susceptibilities. This plea is not made on behalf of the pluralistic citizens of Sarajevo, but in mitigation of Hamas and Hezbollah and Saddam Hussein. One of the many pleasures of Lévy's book is the care he takes to show the utter cynicism of the godfathers of all this. He quotes by name a Saudi lawyer who specializes in financial transactions: "Islamism is a business," he explains to me with a big smile. "I don't say that because it's my job, or because I see proof of it in my office ten times a day, but because it's a fact. People hide behind Islamism. They use it like a screen saying 'Allah Akbar! Allah Akbar!' But we know that here. We see the deals and the movements behind the curtain. In one way or another, it all passes through our hands. We do the

paperwork. We write the contracts. And I can tell you that most of them couldn't care less about Allah. They enter Islamism because it's nothing other than a source of power and wealth, especially in Pakistan. ... Take the young ones in the madrassas. They see the high rollers in their SUVs having five wives and sending their children to good schools, much better than the madrassas. They have your Pearl's killer, Omar Sheikh, right in front of their eyes. When he gets out of the Indian prisons and returns to Lahore, what do the neighbors see? He's very well-dressed. He has a Land Cruiser. He gets married and the city's big-shots come to his wedding."

Everything we know about al-Qaida's operations, as of those of Saddam Hussein, suggests that they combine the culture of a crime family or cartel with the worst habits of a bent multinational corporation. Yet the purist critics of "globalization" tend to assume that the spiritual or nationalistic claims of such forces still deserve to be taken at their own valuation, lest Western "insensitivity" be allowed to triumph.

And this in turn suggests another latent connection, which Lévy does not stress at all though he does dwell upon one of its obvious symptoms. The most toxic and devotional rhetoric of these Islamic gangsters is anti-Semitism. And what does anti-Semitism traditionally emphasize? Why, the moving of secret money between covert elites in order to achieve world domination! The crazed maps of future Muslim conquest that are pictured by the propaganda of jihad and that show the whole world falling to future Muslim conquest are drawn in shady finance-houses and hideaways of stolen gold and portable currency, in the capital cities of paranoid states, and are if anything emulations of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion rather than negations of them. Lévy's reformulation of an old term—"neo-anti-Judaism" instead of the worn-out phrase "anti-Semitism"—is harder on the tongue but more accurate as regards the corrupt and vicious foe with which we are actually dealing. His book was finished before it became clear that the "resistance" in Iraq was also being financed by an extensive mafia, which offers different bonuses for different kamikaze tactics, as it was already doing in Palestine and Kashmir.

In a recent conversation, M. Lévy said to me carefully that he doubts the conventional wisdom of the Western liberal, who believes that a settlement in Palestine will remove the inflammation that produces jihad. A settlement in Palestine would be a good thing in itself, to be sure. But those who believe in its generally healing

power, he said, have not been following events in Kashmir. Indeed, it is from the Pakistani-Saudi periphery that the core challenge comes. I don't think that anyone who follows Lévy's inquiry into corruption and fanaticism, and the intimate bond between them, will ever listen patiently to any facile argument again.