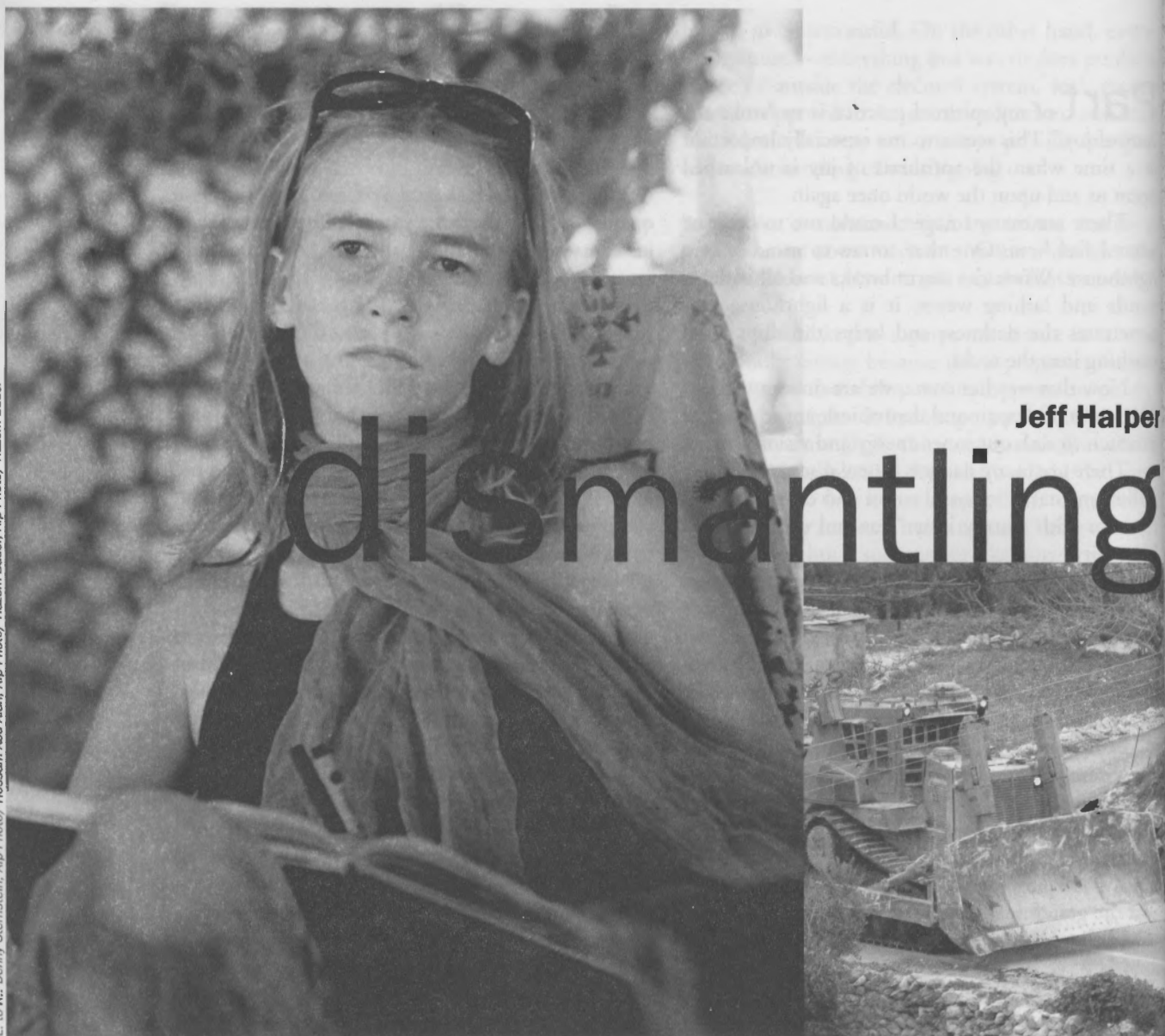


finding courage

L. to R.: Denny Sternstein, Afp Photo/ Hossam Abu Alan, Afp Photo/ Hazem Bader, Afp Photo/ Hazem Bader



Jeff Halper

dismantling



If any country could protect its citizens from terror through force, it should be the state of Israel, with one of the world's most sophisticated security regimes. But, as one Israeli recounts, instead of feeling secure, Israelis are increasingly terrorized and Palestinians are increasingly in despair

On March 17, a 23-year-old American college student died in the southern Gaza city of Rafah after trying to stop an Israeli-driven bulldozer from tearing down a Palestinian physician's home. A few minutes after Rachel Corrie spoke with the driver to try to convince him to stop, and while she looked at him, he ran over her, then backed over her again.

Rachel was not the first person killed as a result of Israel's cruel policy of house demolitions. In March, Nuha Makadma Sweidan and her unborn child were also killed in Gaza when Israeli army sappers "accidentally" demolished their home when they blew up another home nearby. A few weeks before that, an elderly woman and a disabled man died under the rubble of their Gazan homes when

population. They both acted in their countries with a sense of Manifest Destiny, both motivated by the belief that their conquest and colonization were divinely blessed. They are both societies that believe themselves to have a special mission to the rest of humanity (to be "a light unto the nations," to bring democracy to benighted countries). As the strongest power in the Middle East, Israel places its ability to impose its exclusive claim to the entire Land of Israel (including the Occupied Territories) on its military superiority. The United States, the strongest power in the world, asserts its hegemony over the planet through military force. Especially since September 11, both perceive themselves as besieged fortresses—Fortresses of Fear—alienated from a hostile outside

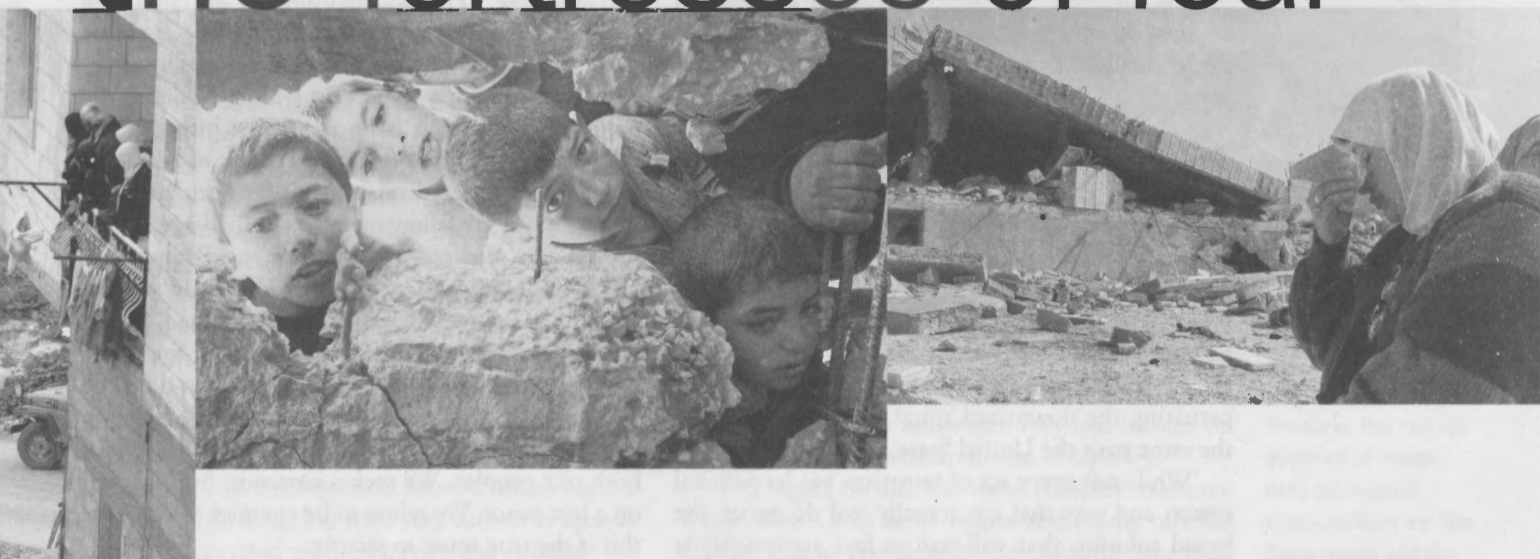
FACING PAGE, LEFT: Rachel Corrie.

FACING PAGE, RIGHT: Palestinians watch an Israeli bulldozer.

BELOW LEFT: Palestinian children peek through a demolished home.

BELOW RIGHT: A mother cries near her son's demolished house

the fortresses of fear



the soldiers "failed to notice" them. Yet Rachel was the first American to be killed this way, and her death shocked the world as Palestinian deaths do not.

Among the ironies of her death was the fact that the bulldozer was American-made. The United States has long been Israel's primary ally, and increasingly pursues the same strategies in its quest for security. Yet Rachel's death suggests that these intertwined policies are a dead-end for both countries.

As an Israeli Jew who has traveled frequently to the United States, I believe that Israel and the United States share many features. They are both European-settler states that displaced an indigenous

world and threatened by it. Israelis often use the term "Fortress Israel" to describe our country. In the U.S., the image of a fortress is embedded in *The Star Spangled Banner*.

The house Rachel died protecting, Dr. Samir Nasrallah's home, was demolished as part of Israel's efforts to protect its fortress. Like dozens of other houses that have been bulldozed in that section of the dense refugee camp, Nasrallah's lay within a wide "security strip" that Israel wants to create along the border with Egypt. No compensation was given to Dr. Nasrallah, no opportunity to appeal to any court, no alternative housing offered. Simply demolition that left his family homeless, impoverished, traumatized, ruined. Dr. Nasrallah had engaged in no hostile activities, had not been charged with anything. According to United Nations figures, less than 600 of the 10,000 houses demolished since the occupation began in 1967 involved security suspects. The rest—94 percent—were simply houses of ordinary

people who were in Israel's way.

So why does Israel pursue such a policy that seems tailor-made to generate hatred against it?

The fear, of course, is real. Israel has known terrorist attacks for many years. In the years after the founding of the state when *fedayun* (Palestinians displaced from their homes) attacked Israeli settlements. In the 1970s, under the auspices of the PLO and other liberation organizations; and since 1996, when the Muslim fundamentalist organizations Hamas and Islamic Jihad opened their campaign of suicide bombings. Since the start of the second Intifada in September 2000, some 700 Israeli civilians have been killed in terrorist (or, according to the Palestinians, resistance) actions. About 2,400 Palestinians have been killed in the same time-frame. On a common-sense level, measures taken against terrorism have a compelling logic. States do have a responsibility to protect their citizens. But when the fight against terrorism is divorced from its larger political context, when the causes of terrorism are left out of the equation—as when terrorists are dismissed as merely “evil” people—then such measures are futile.

Few Israelis have yet made that connection. They believe that if terrorism cannot be quelled completely, at least it can be brought down to “manageable” levels. Without any way to end the attacks, and with no political analysis or alternative, all that is left is to hunker down. Personal safety becomes an obsession. People who believe there is no way out elect hard-liners like Sharon, who offer at least an iron fist against the terrorists, thus perpetuating the downward spiral of violence. This is the same path the United States is now treading.

While not every act of terrorism has its political reason and acts that are actually evil do occur, the broad solution that will reduce fear appreciably is known—but “dry,” not capable of competing with the adrenaline rush of a war. In a multicultural world in which inequalities are growing ever more stark and even the smallest groups are acquiring access to weapons of mass destruction, international humanitarian law, in contrast to military operations, offers perhaps the only way out of the Fortress of Fear. Under the definition of “crimes against humanity,” the perpetrators of the September 11 attacks could have been apprehended, charged, prosecuted and sentenced without recourse to “holy wars” or the feeling that one part of the world is ganging up on another. Similarly, the Fourth Geneva Convention offers a blueprint for dismantling the Israeli occupation and granting Palestinians their independence

while still ensuring Israel security and regional integration. International tribunals, working with the legal systems of individual countries, are capable of meting out justice and holding states accountable if only the international community supports them.

Only a human rights approach that offers a level playing field to everyone will reduce our fears and allow us to leave our fortresses. It requires a type of engagement based on economic development and parity. But for many in power the fortresses are more important than freedom from fear. They are, after all, the sources of power, of domination. They house what Eisenhower called the “military-industrial complex.” Indeed, another major point of similarity between the United States and Israel is the tremendous resources they throw into armaments. Fear, it turns out, is the fuel of the New World Order. Ending fear will require states and their industrial-military interests to give up power and the prospect of dominating and “winning.” This is a tall order. As any child who plays video games will tell you, win-lose is much more exciting, understandable and compelling than win-win. Lacking a leadership willing to dismantle the matrix of fear, it is up to us, the international civil society, to dismantle our Fortresses of Fear.

It is the need to dismantle our fortress that motivates me and my fellow members of the Israeli peace movement. We resist demolition as Rachel did, block the bulldozers with our bodies, and rebuild Palestinian homes when they are demolished. For by doing so we, as Israeli Jews, are saying to the Palestinians: We acknowledge your existence as a people and your right to be in this country. We want to share this country with you, based on the rights of both our peoples. We seek a common future based on a just peace. We refuse to be enemies. We believe this is the true route to security.

Rachel was not an Israeli. As a member of the International Solidarity Movement, she was a member of the international civil society, as we all are. In her actions she affirmed her responsibility for upholding the inherent dignity and equal rights of all people, including their right to a nationality. She non-violently opposed the violence that occupation does to the Palestinians.

It was not the bulldozer but Rachel who was making Israel safer. I believe she made her own country safer too.

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