

4-Armed with principles

>
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>
>The Chicago Tribune
>April 22, 2003

>
>(Archived at <http://electronicintifada.net/v2/article1383.shtml>)

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>In February, Rachel Corrie, a 23-year-old college student from
>Olympia, Wash., wrote an e-mail from Gaza to her family back home.
>Corrie observed, "I don't know if many of the children here have
>ever existed without tank-shell holes in their walls and the towers
>of an occupying army surveying them constantly from the near
>horizons. I think, although I'm not entirely sure, that even the
>smallest of these children understand that life is not like this
>everywhere." Corrie wanted to change those children's reality. On
>March 16, she was crushed to death by an Israeli army bulldozer as
>she attempted to prevent the destruction of a Palestinian family's
>home.

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>The Israeli army investigated itself and exonerated its personnel of
>any responsibility in Rachel Corrie's death. But photographs and
>eyewitness accounts show Corrie was clearly visible, wearing the
>bright red vest worn by all members of the International Solidarity
>Movement, the peace group that uses such non-violent means as
>positioning activists as "human shields" around the occupied
>territories to protect Palestinian civilians.

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>On April 5, Israeli troops in the West Bank town of Jenin, shot
>Brian Avery, 24, of Albuquerque. Avery suffered serious wounds to
>his head and face, from a heavy caliber machine gun, at a time when
>no clashes were reported in the area.

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>And on April 11, Thomas Hurndall, 21, a British citizen, was shot by
>Israeli forces near Rafah, in Gaza, as he escorted a group of
>Palestinian children out of the line of fire. Hurndall is on life
>support in an Israeli hospital, with a gunshot wound to the head and
>there is almost no hope of recovery. Again, there was no fighting
>reported in the area, and like Corrie, photographs show that
>Hurndall wore a bright red vest.

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>Many activists fear these shootings are part of a pattern, and that
>Israel is deliberately targeting internationals, so that it can
>carry out human-rights abuses unobserved. Whatever the truth,
>Americans and other foreign citizens are falling victim to Israeli
>tactics that have killed and injured thousands of Palestinians. A
>lack of accountability means that such incidents could increase.

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>Repeatedly, the international community has caved when faced with
>Israeli defiance. The difference between the docile international
>community, on the one hand, and individuals like Corrie, Hurndall
>and Avery, on the other, is that these individuals refused to be
>turned back. They left the safety of their lives to go unarmed,
>except with their principles, into harm's way, because they believed
>someone had to act where governments refused to do so.

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>When you look at their ages and backgrounds, Corrie, Hurndall and
>Avery are similar to the American and British men and women fighting
>in Iraq. Although Corrie served this country's highest ideals as
>faithfully as any soldier, the U.S. has not insisted that those who
>killed her be held accountable. For Avery and Hurndall, there is no
>24-hour news coverage, and no special airlift to bring them home to
>an appreciative nation. Their families and friends are left to cope
>with these devastating tragedies alone.

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>At the beginning of Israel's crackdown on the Palestinians, we could
>anguish at the deaths of strangers, like 12-year-old Muhammad
>al-Durra, or the innocent Israeli teenagers murdered in 2001 by a
>Palestinian suicide bomber at a Tel Aviv discotheque. Almost three
>years later, with victims mounting, no one has the emotional
>capacity to mourn for so many. But the killing of Corrie, and the
>shooting of Avery and Hurndall, renew for me the sense of personal
>anguish at the fate of strangers. This is not because the victims
>are American or British, but because their presence in one of the
>world's most dangerous places was not an accident of birth. They
>came for love of humanity and with a thirst for justice, and paid an
>unbearable price.