4-Armed with principles

> By Ali Abunimah
>
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>
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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 Albequerque. 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.

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.

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.

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