More Blood in Rafah

by Starhawk

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In Rafah another activist from the International Solidarity Movement was shot. Tom Hurndall was shot in the head by a sniper from an Israeli guard tower on the Egyptian border of the Gaza strip. The guard towers surround Gaza, which has become a kind of open-air prison overlaid on an idyllic land of sun and sea and orange groves. Here and there a few olive groves remain, or a flock of sheep and goats graze an empty lot. Farmers bring produce to market in donkey carts, and old women bake bread in clay ovens. An ancient order survives under an overlay of concrete, dust and rubble, menaced by bulldozers, sniper towers, tanks that shoot at night, acres of razor wire and no-man’s land now being further extended to border a thirty-foot high concrete wall which marches across the landscape, cutting Rafah irrevocably off from Egypt.

The wall is presumably for ‘security’—to prevent suicide bombers and weapons from entering Israel. But in reality, the wall is the next move in the Israeli policy of confiscation and control.

In the West Bank, the route of the wall strolls out from the Green Line that marks the pre-1967 boundary, rambles all over the countryside and steals more than half of the remaining land from the Palestinians. Cities such as Nablus and Jenin will be encircled and enclosed in isolated Bantustans. In the Qualquilya area, the first phase of wall construction took fifty per cent of the villagers’ farmland and nineteen wells that provided a third of the area’s water. Mas’Ha stands to lose over ninety per cent of its farmland. A nation of gardeners and farmers will become a nation of prisoners—the wall the visible, irrevocable finalization of a policy that already restricts movement with hundreds of checkpoints, splits families, makes daily life an almost impossible gauntlet of delays and humiliations. The wall will put an end to any hope of a two-state solution. Once it is complete, no viable Palestinian state can exist. Palestinians and their supporters have feared that the Israelis will forcibly remove or ‘transfer’ the Palestinians out of the West Bank. Instead, the policy now seems to be to surround, isolate and enclose the Palestinian population into a giant prison colony of a greater Israel.

In the Gaza strip, this policy is already well advanced. Sniper towers and guard stations are everywhere. Tanks patrol the border areas at night, and soldiers shoot, sometimes randomly and sometimes deliberately, down city streets, into houses, at crowds of children.

To build the wall, in both Gaza and the West Bank, the Israelis bulldoze olive trees and homes that stand in the way. Three weeks ago, twenty-three year old Rachel Corrie was deliberately run over by a bulldozer while trying to prevent home demolitions. The
Israelis have not seriously investigated her death, nor held the soldiers responsible accountable. As far as we know, they have not been disciplined or punished in any way. Instead, deliberate murder of internationals seems to have become policy.

I am well aware that thousands, most likely hundreds of thousands of young men and some women the age of Brian and Rachel and Tom have died in Iraq in the last week. That hundreds of Palestinians have died, unnoticed by the world’s media. In numbers, the dead become faceless. It’s heard to fathom the weight of this pain multiplied hundreds of thousands of times.

Tom and Rachel have faces to me, because they were part of our group, doing the same work here of using nonviolent tactics to open some space for change. Tom and Rachel have faces.

I spent Thursday visiting Brian Avery, who a week ago was shot in the face by the heavy mounted gun from an Israeli Armored Personnel Carrier. Brian and I had done checkpoint watch together in Nablus. He is a gardener, an organic farmer, a musician, presently facing a year of major operations to restore a shattered nose and jaw and cheeks and a split tongue. Brian’s face is currently a grotesque and painful mask, but he has one. He is the lucky one, he will survive, brain intact, eyes and senses functional. He will even be able to speak.

Tom was twenty three years old, from Manchester, England. He was shot trying to protect children, to snatch them out of the range of sniper fire coming from an Israeli guard tower, where soldiers stand hidden and safe, taking aim from at Palestinians for sport. The soldiers were shooting at a group of children gathering at a road block. Tom had grabbed a young boy out of the zone of fire and brought him to safety. He went back to try and rescue two young girls who were afraid to move. The Israeli soldiers shot him in the head.

Tom had gone to Iraq, as a nonviolent peace witness to do humanitarian aid, but he and his friends had been forced to leave and had headed across Jordan to Palestine to join the International Solidarity Movement. Now he lies on a ventilator, unconscious and unlikely ever to recover.

Tom was in the training I helped to give last week, and all of us are feeling the weight of responsibility. Did we teach them the right things, the right way to assess danger and make choices? Did we give them the information they need to survive?

And yet I can’t quite imagine what else we might or might not have said to Tom, or to the activists who were with him, who were also with Rachel when she died and have not given up or gone home or abandoned Rafah. Could I say to a young man courageous enough to brave gunfire to rescue children that he should have stood aside and let them be shot? That he should have saved his life over theirs?

"Why?" the Palestinians ask me over and over again, when I admit to being an American. They never say, "I hate America," just, "Why? Why bomb Iraq? Why kill children?"
I’m left in the same blank state of incomprehension. Why kill children? Why spill more blood in Rafah? Why order soldiers to shoot unarmed peace activists in the head?

Call your local Israeli embassy, and ask them these questions.

If you are British, ask your embassy to pressure for an investigation into Tom’s shooting.

If you are an American citizen, ask your congressional representatives to pressure the Israeli’s to investigate Rachel’s death and Brian’s shooting.

Contact your Member of Congress [http://www.house.gov/writerep/](http://www.house.gov/writerep/)

and ask for support of H. Con. Res. 111 to express sympathy for the death of Rachel Corrie and demand an investigation into her death.

Or if you live in Washington DC and have no voting rights and, therefore, have no voting Representative in Congress, contact Hon. Eleanor Holmes Norton and ask for her support:

[http://www.norton.house.gov/feedback.cfm?campaign=norton&amp;type=Contact%20Me](http://www.norton.house.gov/feedback.cfm?campaign=norton&amp;type=Contact%20Me)

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