

Earl Raab

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### THE BIG LIE

The Big Lie, perfected by Hitler, is the telling of such a massive untruth so often, that people will tend to accept it as a ballpark truth.

The Big Lie, in this case, begins with the tragic question of how many civilians have been killed in Lebanon in the past couple of weeks. Death is not a numbers' game. The loss of one innocent life deserves as much mourning as the loss of a thousand. But there is a political significance in the numbers that are used.

According to a full page ad in the N.Y. Times on June 20, headed "Death and Devastation in Lebanon," 40,000 people had been killed and wounded. The media have often made references to 10 thousand or 15 thousand civilians killed in Southern Lebanon, and 20 thousand wounded.

As of Monday of this week, when such figures were being bruited about, Israel had found that 265 civilians had been killed in Sidon, 56 in Tyre, 10 in Nabatiyeh, and about 40 in the Ein Al Hilweh camp--about 400 altogether in Southern Lebanon, compared with the 10 to 15 thousand so often cited in the media. (No one's figures included PLO-controlled Beirut where the facts were not yet ascertainable.) The number of civilian wounded in any war is generally about three times the number

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killed. Israel reports that the number of civilian wounded remaining in hospitals in Southern Lebanon and in Israel at the beginning of the week was about 700.

Counting war dead and wounded is a grisly matter; one dead or wounded is too many. But in this case there is political significance in the discrepancies. In the middle of a war, it is impossible to accept the exact accuracy of any such figures. But the PLO and the Red Crescent have inflated the figures in a massive manner, and for an obvious reason. The purpose is to suggest by these figures that the Israeli society is the war machine aspiring to war; the PLO is the peace machine aspiring to peace. That is the Big Lie.

As to the media, they apparently have a built-in problem. Some of them-- such as the San Francisco Chronicle--have modified their earlier inflated figures, but it is the earliest figures which usually stick. The media live on sensation, just as urban pigeons live on debris. High figures attract attention; low figures don't. Pictures of carnage sell more newspapers and raise TV ratings higher than words describing the nature of the PLO. And pictures of Jews engaging in war are more sensational than pictures of Arabs engaging in war. We are not expected to do such things.

The media may be right about those expectations, since there seem to be a

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number of Jews who share them. Some American Jews are positive Hawks when it comes to American action for self-defense. They supported Kennedy's threat to Cuba, for example, and would have supported any implementing military action. But these American Jewish Hawks can't stand the image of Jews taking a roughly similar action in Southern Lebanon.

They can't adjust to the idea that Israel is a political nation, and, in order to survive, must act like other political nations on the world scene. Indeed, the need to do so is accentuated by the fact that Israel has a special Jewish meaning--as the last refuge for many of the Jews of the world. Peace is the desperate goal of the Israeli society, but there is no peace without survival.