

JULY 19

The most dangerous alliance in the world

After getting out of Lebanon, writer June Rugh told Reuters: "As an American, I'm embarrassed and ashamed. My administration is letting it happen [by giving] tacit permission for Israel to destroy a country." The news service quoted another American evacuee, Andrew Muha, who had been in southern Lebanon. He said: "It's a travesty. There's a million homeless in Lebanon and the intense amount of bombing has brought an entire country to its knees."

Embarrassing. Shameful. A travesty. Those kinds of words begin to describe the alliance between the United States and Israel. Here are a few more: Government criminality. High-tech terror. Mass murder from the skies. The kind of premeditated action that the U.S. representative in Nuremberg at the International Conference on Military Trials – Supreme Court Justice Robert L. Jackson – was talking about on August 12, 1945, when he declared that "no grievances or policies will justify resort to aggressive war. It is utterly renounced and condemned as an instrument of policy."

The United States and Israel. Right now, it's the most dangerous alliance in the world. Of course, Israeli officials talk about murderous crimes against civilians by Hezbollah and Hamas. And Hezbollah and Hamas officials talk about murderous crimes against civilians by Israel. Plenty of real crimes to go around. At the same time, by any measure, Israelis have done a lot more killing than dying. (If you doubt that, take a look at the website of the Israeli human rights group B'Tselem and its documentation of deadly events.)

In American media, the current mumbling about the need for "restraint" is little better than window-dressing for bomb-dropping. The prevalent dynamic is based on a chain of rarely spoken lies, however conscious or unconscious: none more important than the lie that a religion can make one life worth more than another; render a human death unimportant; elevate certain war-inflicted agonies to spiritual significance.

"Israel has overwhelming military superiority in both southern Lebanon and Gaza," the New York Times noted in mid-July. A pattern is deeply entrenched in U.S. media and politics: the smaller-scale killers condemned, the larger-scale killers justified with endless rationales.

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Stripping away the righteous rhetoric, media manipulation and routine journalistic contortions, what remains in joint U.S.-Israeli policy is the unspoken assumption that might makes right. Myths spin around as convenient. Israel ceremoniously "withdraws" from Gaza, only to come back with missiles and troops however and whenever it pleases. The West Bank also continues to be a place of subjugation and resistance. And, as W.H. Auden observed, "Those to whom evil is done / Do evil in return."

The Israeli leaders who launched July's state-of-the-killing-art air assault on Gaza and Lebanon had to know that many civilians would be killed, many others wounded, many more terrorized. The smug moral posturing that Israel's military does not target specific civilians is moldy political grist – and, in human terms, irrelevant to the totally predictable carnage.

"There are terrorists who will blow up innocent people in order to achieve tactical objectives," President Bush said on July 13. Of course he was referring to actions by Hezbollah and Hamas. We're supposed to pretend that Israel does not also "blow up innocent people in order to achieve tactical objectives."

Israel calls itself a Jewish state, and its leadership often claims to represent the interests of Jewish people. Killers who terrorize often claim to be acting on blessed behalf of others of the faith. Muslims, Christians, Jews, Hindus... By now, such demagoguery ought to be transparent.

In the 40th year of Israel's unconscionable occupation of Palestinian territories, Israeli leaders have their agenda. What's ours?

It should include clearly opposing the most dangerous alliance in the world.

In the United States, evading the "might makes right" core of the alliance is easy. The dodge makes dropping bombs on Lebanon and Gaza that much easier for the Israeli government. As usual, you can hear it in the weasel-worded statements from even the better politicians on Capitol Hill. You can read it in New York Times editorials. Instead of saying that aggressive war by Israel "is utterly renounced and condemned as an instrument of policy," the message is that aggressive war by Israel is accepted and embraced as an instrument of policy.

Most of all, you can hear it in the silence.

Norman Solomon's latest book, "War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death," was published in paperback this summer. For information, go to: www.normansolomon.com