

parents . . . simply because Homer and Marge are the people most genuinely

attached to Bart, Lisa, and Maggie, since the children are their own offspring.”

Who Governs?

International organizations such as the International Monetary Fund and the European Central Bank may do much good, but Robert Dahl, the noted Yale University political scientist, points out in *Social Research* (Fall 1999) that they share a grave defect.

After the extraordinary triumphs of democracy in the 20th century, must we, at the century's end, turn to the antidemocratic visions of Plato and Confucius in the hope that we can entrust the governments of international organizations to rulers of adequate virtue, wisdom, and incorruptibility? This would require rulers virtuous enough to seek good ends, wise enough to know the best means to achieve them, and sufficiently incorruptible to maintain their virtue and wisdom despite the temptations of power, ideology, and dogma.

The historical record is not, in my view, reassuring, and I confess that I am as skeptical about the desirability of guardianship in governing international organizations as I am about its desirability in governing countries. Yet solutions are unclear. Consequently, I hope that in the coming century some of our best social scientists would turn to the question of how international organizations can be governed in ways consistent with democratic goals.

FOREIGN POLICY & DEFENSE

Too Much Information

“The Surprising Logic of Transparency” by Bernard I. Finel and Kristin M. Lord, in *International Studies Quarterly* (June 1999), Blackwell Publishers, Inc., 350 Main St., Malden, Mass. 02148.

Transparency is a popular buzzword among the international relations cognoscenti these days, reassuringly suggesting, in this age of Matt Drudge and Cable Network News, that an open society's abundance of available information gives peace a better chance. "Tain't usually so, declare Finel and Lord, professors of political science at Georgetown University and George Washington University, respectively.

They examined seven international crises, from the War of 1812 to the Sino-Soviet border dispute of 1969—all cases in which neither side wanted war, though in four cases, it came anyway. With the exception of World War I, on which the impact was unclear, Finel and Lord found that “transparency” often worsened the crisis. In one case, it appeared that a *lack* of trans-

parency allowed an easing of tensions.

Take the 1967 conflict between “transparent” Israel and opaque Egypt, which led to a short war in June that neither wanted. Israel's openness to outside observers did no favor to Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser. He seemed “overwhelmed by the ‘noise’ of Israeli domestic politics,” the authors say. “Due to press reports that emphasized the more belligerent statements made by Israeli leaders, media reports that highlighted divided domestic opinion about how to respond, and Nasser's consequent presumption that he could safely draw out the crisis for political gain, transparency exacerbated rather than mitigated the pressures for war.” Nasser had so much information, in short, that he could “see whatever he wanted and con-

firm existing misperceptions about Israeli intentions.”

Nor is informational “noise” necessarily less problematic just because the government trying to penetrate it is a democracy. In an 1898 conflict between Britain and France over territory in the Upper Nile Valley, “the fact that both states had relatively transparent governments and free presses” may well have provided “*more* room for misperception and not less,” the authors say. The press in each country “routinely reported unauthorized views” and played up belligerent statements, while downplaying conciliatory ones. Fortunately, the key policymakers on both

sides “were able to insulate themselves from the pressures produced by transparency,” and kept up secret diplomatic exchanges. But “without transparency,” say Finel and Lord, the crisis “might never have occurred in the first place,” or at least been settled sooner and with less acrimony. As it was, war was finally avoided only because France was willing to accept “a humiliating defeat.”

Like democracy itself, transparency may be, on balance, a good thing, the authors believe. Nevertheless, they say, the fact remains that, particularly in an international crisis, “more information is not always better.”

An Invitation to Meddlers

“Military Success Requires Political Direction” by Ian Bryan, in *Strategic Review* (Fall 1999), United States Strategic Institute, P.O. Box 15618, Kenmore Station, Boston, Mass. 02215.

Ever since the Vietnam War, when President Lyndon Johnson and other civilians allegedly “meddled” in military matters with disastrous results, the view has taken hold in Washington that once America’s elected leaders decide to go to war, they should then step aside and let the generals and admirals determine how best to achieve victory. But history suggests just the opposite lesson, contends Bryan, a U.S. Air Force captain. “Political leaders should intervene in military affairs when necessary to ensure that military action supports national policy.”

What is purported to be the objective “military view” on employing force in a particular situation may largely reflect the military’s bureaucratic imperatives or inter-service rivalries, Bryan notes. The air force, for instance, “has historically been more interested in promoting strategic bombing,” with itself in control, while the army naturally prefers close air support of ground forces, with an army commander in charge. Sometimes the factions collude, Bryan says, leaving “the country paying for unnecessarily redundant capabilities, or fighting its wars inefficiently so that each service gets a piece of the action.” Because all the services took major roles in the attempted Iranian hostage rescue in 1979 and in the invasion of tiny Grenada in

1983, some analysts say, the operational complexity and risks involved were needlessly increased.

Sometimes, the judgments involved in military action go well beyond simple military expertise, Bryan observes. In the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, for example, the military wanted to intercept Soviet ships 800 miles from Cuba. But President John F. Kennedy ordered a 500-mile line instead, giving the Soviets more time to consider the ramifications of challenging the blockade. “Fortunately,” Bryan adds, “since we now know there were about 100 tactical nuclear weapons and 43,000 Soviet troops in Cuba, Kennedy also rejected the Joint Chiefs’ unanimous recommendation to invade the island even after the Soviet ships turned around.”

Civilian direction was also vital in the 1991 Persian Gulf War, Bryan contends. Most U.S. military leaders initially failed to grasp the *political* importance of destroying mobile SCUD missiles, which were inaccurate and posed little military danger. The SCUDs, he notes, could have drawn Israel into the war, shattering the Arab coalition.

Even in the case of Vietnam, says Bryan, Johnson’s micromanagement of the war has been much exaggerated. “Johnson’s real blunder was that he pursued a flawed