

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

overall policy in Vietnam, not that he forced military action in line with that policy. . . . In fact, there were many areas” — such as General William Westmoreland’s

counterproductive attrition strategy — “where the Johnson administration *should* have intervened to change military policy in Vietnam, but failed to do so.”

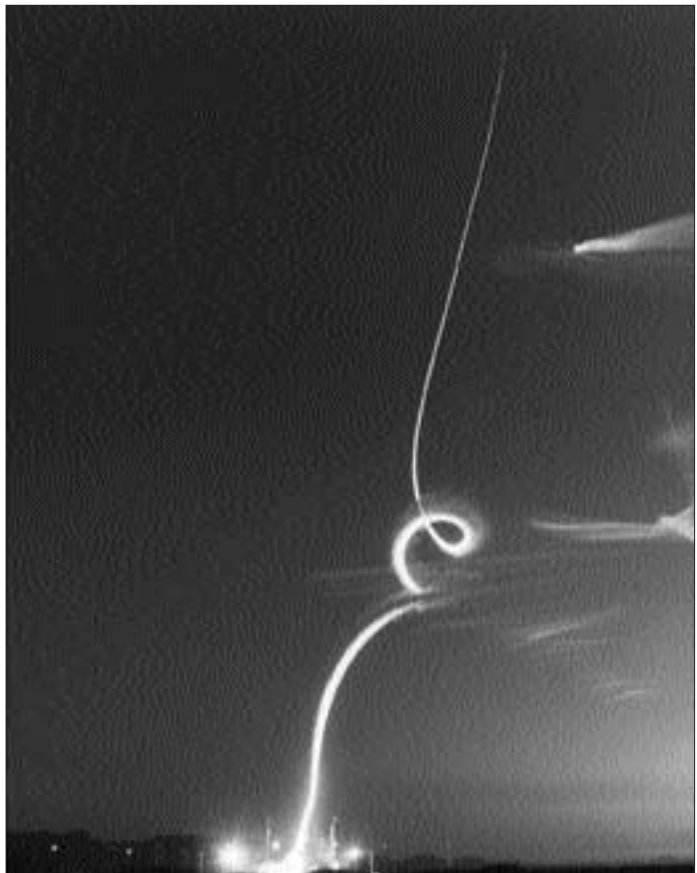
## *The New Missile Debate*

“National Missile Defense: An Indefensible System” by George Lewis, Lisbeth Gronlund, and David Wright, in *Foreign Policy* (Winter 1999–2000), Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1779 Massachusetts Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036; “Star Wars Strikes Back” by Michael O’Hanlon, in *Foreign Affairs* (Nov.–Dec. 1999), 58 E. 68th St., New York, N.Y. 10021.

Should the United States build a limited national missile defense system to protect itself against intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) launched by “rogue” states such as North Korea? With a decision due this year from the Clinton administration, critics such as Lewis and his colleagues, from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology’s Security Studies Program, warn that such a system could put U.S. security at *greater* risk. They have valid concerns, argues O’Hanlon, a Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution, but, on balance, deployment makes sense.

In contrast with former President Ronald Reagan’s Strategic Defense Initiative, which would have created a space-based shield against a massive Soviet nuclear attack, a new system would defend the nation against direct attack by using ground-based interceptors to destroy incoming warheads. While such a system is “technically feasible” in theory, say Lewis, Gronlund, and Wright, associate director and research fellows, respectively, at the MIT program, “adversaries would be able to take straightforward steps to defeat” it by using decoy or disguised warheads.

“Worse still,” they claim, deployment — which would be at odds with the 1972 U.S.-Soviet Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty — would unravel “decades of efforts to reduce U.S. and Russian nuclear stockpiles and to limit proliferation of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles worldwide.” Alarming both Russia and China, deployment could lead to “a world with more ICBMs and weapons of mass destruction.”



*Theater defense missiles, such as the high-altitude THAAD launched in a test last June, have successfully intercepted other missiles, but a national missile defense system remains controversial.*