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**PRESS & TELEVISION**


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### *Covering Defense*

"The Media and National Security" by Deborah Shapley, in *Daedalus* (Fall 1982), 1172 Commonwealth Ave., Boston, Mass. 02134.

Defense issues, because of their great complexity, are among the most difficult for the media to cover. But even the best newspaper and television treatments of such topics reveal serious flaws, argues Shapley, Washington editor of *Nature* magazine.

Thus, CBS News's widely publicized five-part series on "The Defense of the United States," aired in June 1981, suffered from TV newsmen's need to "find film"—graphic illustrations of particular points.

"At its best," Shapley observes, "television can certainly take the viewer along to witness meaningful events." But it is not very good at conveying ideas. Thus, CBS paid \$90,000 for a dramatic simulation of a nuclear attack on Omaha, Nebraska. Yet, a segment on the ineptness of U.S. troops on a mock nuclear battlefield in Western Europe left its point unclear: Were the soldiers incompetent? Is Army doctrine faulty?

One episode, "The Russians," explained the issues "with admirable clarity," Shapley says. But ironically, CBS was forced to rely on interviews with U.S. specialists—"dead television" to most newscasters.

Newspapers face their own limitations. In 1977, for example, *Washington Post* reporter Walter Pincus discovered the U.S. Army's request for funding of the neutron bomb in an obscure line item of the budget. Pincus's coverage was "a journalistic success," Shapley notes, but important questions were ignored in the ensuing brouhaha.

At first, journalists focused on the weapon itself—a *Post* headline dubbed it a "Killer Warhead." Then attention shifted to whether President Carter would approve production. (He did not.) At first, nobody asked what the leaders of Western Europe, where the weapon was to be deployed, thought. And the press overlooked a basic question: whether *any* nuclear weapons ought to be deployed in Western Europe.

Shapley argues that journalists must overcome their "professional rigidities"—television's need for good "visuals" and newspapers' preoccupation with immediate issues. Given these media proclivities, she concludes, "Much is achieved, but much cannot be attempted."

### *Rating the News From Lebanon*

"Beirut—and the Press—Under Siege" by Roger Morris, in the *Columbia Journalism Review* (Nov.-Dec. 1982), 200 Alton Place, Marion, Oh. 43306.

Critics of U.S. press and TV coverage of Israel's June 1982 invasion of Lebanon have described it as hostile to the Jewish state and, in the words of the *New Republic*'s Martin Peretz, often "simply not true." But