
PRESS & TELEVISION

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

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Morris, a freelance writer, argues otherwise.

Examining nearly three months of coverage by the three major television networks, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and other leading newspapers, Morris argues that journalists reported "for the most part fairly and accurately and sometimes brilliantly."

While critics argue that the U.S. media credited exaggerated estimates of civilian losses from dubious sources, Morris says his own careful examination of the record shows this to be untrue. NBC reported on June 6 that civilian casualties were "unknown"; CBS's June 7 broadcast said only that "casualty lists climbed." In the few cases where a network or newspaper did cite inflated figures, Morris contends, they were qualified or quickly corrected. In one widely criticized story, for example, *Post* reporter David B. Ottaway did cite high estimates of the casualties, but stressed that they "seem guesswork at best."

Complaints that the news media ignored the complex history of Lebanon's internal divisions and the favorable reaction of many Lebanese to the Israelis' arrival are also dismissed by Morris. Between late May and July, the *Times* and the *Post* alone published some 20 stories on such issues, with nearly the same number appearing on television.

The two newspapers did print sharp op-ed page attacks on the Israeli invasion by such columnists as Anthony Lewis and Mary McGrory. But these were offset, according to Morris, by the columns of William F. Buckley, Jr., William Safire, and Evans and Novak. In their own editorials, the papers accepted the invasion as a "tragic inevitability" (*Post*) and part of a "tragic spiral" (*Times*). On television, NBC's John Chancellor's remarks in early August about "imperial Israel" spurred loud protests. But Chancellor's views were balanced, Morris says, by two earlier news reports on the views of Israeli soldiers.

American journalists in Lebanon came under criticism, in part because they refused to settle for the bulletins provided by Israeli authorities—a legacy of their experience with U.S. officialdom in Vietnam. And as the Israeli bombardment of Beirut continued, they developed a sympathy for the civilian victims whose risks they shared. Morris believes such influences improved the reporting. Indeed, he argues, given the circumstances, "readers and viewers could have asked for little more."

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

*The Bishops
and the Bomb*

"Christianity and Deterrence" by R. P. Bär, in the *Atlantic Community Quarterly* (Fall 1982), 1616 H St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20006.

Roman Catholic bishops in several Western countries, including the United States, are edging towards declaring even the possession of nuclear weapons for deterrence immoral. But Bär, auxiliary bishop of Rotterdam, argues that they would exceed their authority and contra-