

nizations, which represented blue-collar Democrats, to rights-oriented liberal reformers and other activists. Democratic presidential hopefuls since 1972 have had to woo an "artificially liberal" primary electorate. They receive "virtually no training in the kinds of accommodation and bargaining essential to general-election victory." And if recent GOP efforts to win support among affluent middle-class blacks are successful, the Democratic

Party will be further isolated as "the party of poor, underclass black America."

To regain its ability to build a winning alliance, the Edsalls say, Democratic liberalism must do what it so far has avoided doing: learn from defeat. For this to happen, in their view, the party may have to suffer even greater defeats (such as loss of control of the House and Senate) or else undergo the sort of "civil war" that Republicans endured during the 1960s.

LBJ and the Wise Men

"Serving the President: The Vietnam Years" by Clark Clifford with Richard Holbrooke, in *The New Yorker* (May 6, 13, 20, 1991), 20 West 43rd St., New York, N.Y. 10036.

On March 31, 1968, President Lyndon B. Johnson stunned the nation by announcing that he would not seek another term in the White House. The surprise came at the end of a speech in which he unveiled a limited halt to the bombing of North Vietnam and proposed peace negotiations. Was his sacrifice made in an effort to end a war that—after prodding by the fabled Wise Men of the American Establishment—he finally had come to realize could not be won? Many people then and since have thought so. But in these excerpts from his long-awaited memoirs, former Defense Secretary Clifford (1968–69) says that LBJ remained ambivalent about his objective.

"I suspect that in the inner recesses of his mind Johnson was torn between a search for an honorable exit and his desire not to be the first president to lose a foreign war," Clifford writes. "During the remainder of his presidency, he sent conflicting signals and possibly lost the opportunity . . . to end the war."

Just five days before his speech, Johnson met with former Secretary of State Dean Acheson, former Deputy Secretary of Defense Cyrus Vance, and several other pillars of the Establishment—and then, after listening to them, took Clifford and Secretary of State Dean Rusk aside and angrily asked, "Who poisoned the well with these guys?" The "poisonous" view they were advancing was that the United States should start to disengage from the war.

Contrary to later legend, Clifford says, the Wise Men were not unanimous in that view. The elder statesmen had gathered in the State Department for a dinner-party discussion of the war and formal briefings the night before their fateful meeting with LBJ. Retired generals Maxwell Taylor and Omar Bradley, former Under-Secretary of State for Political Affairs Robert Murphy, and Supreme Court Justice Abe Fortas favored pressing ahead with the war, as U.S. military commanders wanted. Most of the Wise Men, however, did favor disengagement—and what they had to say did affect Johnson. Dean Acheson, "speaking almost *ex officio* for the foreign-policy establishment . . . had an unquestionable impact on the president," Clifford writes. So did former Korean war negotiator Arthur Dean, who told Johnson that "all of us got the impression last night, listening to [the briefings], that there is no military conclusion in this war—or any military end in the near future."

Just a week earlier, when Clifford had proposed that he call the Wise Men together, the president had still thought of his planned March 31st speech "primarily as a justification for a decision to send . . . more troops [to Vietnam]." And even after LBJ met with the Wise Men, the latest draft of the speech remained "a hard-line defense of the war."

Two days before the speech, however, Johnson indicated that he was going along with a different draft, one that spoke of

“the prospects for peace” and announced a halt in the bombing. Clifford was “truly moved” at the president’s “turn toward peace.” (Even Clifford did not know until just before the speech was delivered, however, of the surprise ending Johnson had

in mind.) But LBJ’s ambivalence did not go away—and so for the next 10 months, his administration was sharply divided over what the goal in Vietnam should be. As a result, Clifford believes, a chance for peace was lost.

FOREIGN POLICY & DEFENSE

*Why the Experts
Were So Wrong*

“Why Were We Surprised?” by W. R. Connor, in *The American Scholar* (Spring 1991), 1811 Q St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20009.

Despite prodigious intellectual labors (and prodigious sums spent to make them possible), Western Sovietologists failed to foresee in any clear way the collapse of communism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Where did the analysts go wrong? Connor, director of the National Humanities Center at Research Triangle Park in North Carolina, says that it was in neglecting the “emotional context” of economic and political change.

Western Sovietologists, he argues, peered at Soviet reality through the thin slit of social science, and paid attention to only a very narrow range of factors: data on military force, economics, agricultural productivity, and the relationships among leaders. And with the focus on the Kremlin, it was hard to see what was happening outside Moscow. The country’s economic distress could be documented and “modeled,” and the “options” available to Soviet leaders, along with their various consequences, calculated. But left out, Connor says, were “the passions—the appeal of ethnic loyalty and nationalism, the demands for freedom of religious practice and cultural expression, and the feeling that the regime had simply lost its moral legitimacy. These considerations were ‘soft’ or ‘unscientific,’ and those who emphasized them could be scorned.” Sovietologists came to assume “that, for our lifetime at least, the Soviet Empire was here to stay.”

Yet even had the analysts had a truer purchase on the Soviet reality, they might

not have been better seers. For it may well be, Connor suggests, that the world has entered a time of radical and unpredictable change. The revolution in Eastern Europe, he notes, coincided with a “widespread resurgence of demands for ethnic autonomy and consequent challenges to multi-ethnic states. These tensions have been evident in some African and Asian lands, and throughout the Middle East and the Balkans and in Canada.”

If the world is in “a period of indeterminate change,” Connor says, what is needed for the education of the statesman and the citizen is not “more elaborate calculations, more sophisticated modeling, or greater expenditures on the familiar forms of ‘security studies,’” but rather a “greater attunement to emotional and moral factors, to the persistent claims of primary attachments, and of religious, ethnic, and national identities.”

True security is likely to be found, Connor writes, not in efforts to develop systems of prediction, but in “an awareness of complexity, a respect for limits, and what the Greeks would call ‘practical intelligence’ At its heart is the recognition that in diplomacy, as in war, plans rarely work out as expected and ironic outcomes are to be anticipated. It prizes, above all, adaptability and teaches, first of all, preparedness. It offers no solutions, no predictions, no assurances of swift reform or universal concord. But in a world of unexpected outcomes such modesty may provide our best hope of survival.”