

“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.”