Who's in charge here?

By Ronald Steel

FACING THE BRINK: An Intimate Study of Crisis Diplomacy. By Edward Weintal and Charles Bartlett. Scribners. 248 pp. $5.95.

High-level political gossip is the lowest of the fine arts and the highest of the base ones. Less instructive than history and less stimulating than polemic, it can, at its best, be more informative than either—filling out the bones of headlines with the flesh of human pride and weakness. It elevates (or reduces) politics from the abstract to the personal, and thereby offers insights—often jarring or depressing—into the life-or-death decisions that others take in our name.

Few perform this art well, because few have access to the private thoughts and semi-secret outbursts of statesmen. Even fewer have the ability to put keyhole observations into perspective. Yet without perspective, political gossip is little more than scandal: amusing, but lightweight stuff. This book manages to combine the highest qualities of gossip with a sense of history and even a gift for analysis. Beneath its lightweight exterior, it helps put our cold war diplomacy into a new—and disconcerting—perspective.

Edward Weintal, longtime diplomatic correspondent for *Newsweek*, and Charles Bartlett, political columnist and former confidant of John F. Kennedy, have a splendid ear for gossip, and a taste for scandal. Eavesdroppers in the corridors of power for the past two decades, they have amassed a gold mine of political ore and diplomatic scandal. The fact that some of the ore may be gold dust rather than the real thing does not make it any less glittering. *Facing the Brink* is a brilliantly detailed outsider's account of how the insiders behave when the chips are down. Rich in anecdotes, studded with fascinating new material, embellished with the gripes and off-the-cuff comments of key officials, and held together by shrewd analytical judgments, this book lights up the dark corners of power. While far from flawless, it is an indispensable guide to the diplomacy of brinksmanship.

The best parts of this book are the capsule accounts of the crises in Lebanon, Cyprus, Yemen, Cuba, and Viet Nam. As for Lebanon, we learn that the National Security Council—ostensibly the President's chief foreign policy advisory body—never even discussed the crisis that led to our 1958 troop landings. Further, it is revealed that only at the last minute did the U. S. Army division decide to leave its atomic weapons behind when it launched an assault on the beaches of Beirut—where it encountered only token resistance from ice-cream vendors and girls in bikinis.

Among our other Arab imbroglios was the anti-royalist rebellion in Yemen, where we simultaneously tried to appease Nasser by recognizing the rebels, and then to placate the Saudis by offering them U. S. Air Force planes to shoot down Egyptian aircraft—an action by which, as the authors observe, "the U. S. could have stumbled into a shooting war with Nasser for the sake of Yemen, a desolate, disease-ridden primitive tribal enclave." We escaped that one, but the description of the issue at stake would almost fit Viet Nam.

Another eastern Mediterranean crisis into which the U. S. stuck its nose was the civil war in Cyprus. Despite the fact that the Greek and Turkish communities had been feuding for more than a decade and that the 1959 independence accords could not possibly hold up, the U. S. had no solution for ending the strife. This, however, did not deter Washington from involving itself and from demanding a settlement. Yet when the Greek prime minister asked our emissary George Ball what kind of accord the U. S. wanted, "the Undersecretary fell back again on his contention that the U. S. had no specific plan in mind." Fortunately, the whole problem was fobbed off on the United Nations before there was a call to land the Marines. A fascinating sidelight to this episode is the revelation that President Johnson threatened Turkey with a withdrawal of U. S. support against the Russians if they persisted in their plan to invade Cyprus. So much for NATO's common front against the Red Peril.

The relations of the U. S. with its NATO allies form some of the most interesting parts of the book. There is, for example, an exceedingly useful account of the State Department's efforts to sabotage Gaullist diplomacy in Europe—an effort highlighted by the December, 1962, meeting at Nassau when Kennedy promised Polaris missiles to Harold Macmillan ("We did not even know the meaning of the words we were using at Nassau," Kennedy later confided), and which inspired de Gaulle to veto Britain's bid for membership in the Common Market. After that, anti-Gaullism became the hallmark of U. S. policy toward Europe, and George Ball its high priest. So virulent was this policy—until it was reversed by President Johnson—that the State Department blatantly tried to break up the Franco-German accord and to isolate Paris by making Bonn our favorite European ally. This, too, backfired with the collapse of the Erhard government and the refusal of the Europeans to see the world through Washington's eyes.

In certain circles anti-Gaullism became a kind of obsession. Our ambassador to Paris, for example, decided it was beneath his dignity to try to understand French policy. "Mr. Bohlen," the authors quote an aide as declaring, "not only does not know what de Gaulle thinks but is not even interested." It is to President Johnson's credit that he has called a halt to this irresponsible pettiness and has refused to engage in anti-Gaullist diatribes. "I keep mum," he told a group of French journalists in 1966. "I told everybody in the government to be polite to General de Gaulle. Just tip your hat and say, 'thank you, General.'" The President obviously does not have any answers for what ails Europe, but he is not trying to push the MLF down NATO's throat, nor the Common Market down Britain's. He knows the limits of European independence—despite the antagonisms of General de Gaulle—and toward Europe he has behaved with statesmanship, restraint, and an enlightened conception of the national interest. One can regret only that he has not done so well in Viet Nam.

Although the authors claim there are no heroes or villains in their book, their hearts were obviously won by the Kennedy style. Where Johnson is described as "afraid of the unknown," a politician heavily dependent on "his talent for twisting arms," and an impetuous man with "the capacity to unleash forces which could not be recaptured by subsequent remorse," "Kennedy was different." He radiated "seemingly limitless opportunities to exert his capacities in every direction, to achieve noble innovations and reforms and, above all, to take meaningful steps toward world order." During his brief tenure, "Kennedy's buoyant personality brightened the image of the United States," and he was "well on his way to becoming a world leader." "Johnson," on the other hand, "has not taken his first major stride in that direction."

Like Kennedy himself, the authors tend to confuse image with action, and to admire style at the expense of substance. Yet as they themselves reluctantly admit, "there is no evidence that a flow of new concepts and new initiatives was turned loose by liberating the foreign policy machinery from the Eisenhower committee system." The sad truth is that Kennedy's diplomacy was a succession of gimmicks in search of an image. Grandiose plans were announced, such as the multilateral nuclear force, the Alliance for Progress, or the Grand Design for a unified Europe—and then forgotten, or allowed to stagnate long after they proved unworkable.

Kennedy stumbled into the Bay of Pigs—a folly that an astute politician like Lyndon Johnson would never have committed—and then desperately sought to repair his image by exaggerating the Berlin crisis of 1961 (including the deliberately-manipulated civil defense scare) and by increasing the U. S. involvement in Viet Nam. "Had he not suffered reverses in the Bay of Pigs and Laos," we are told, "it may well be that President Kennedy would have thought twice before expanding the Viet Nam commitment early in 1962 from 700 to 11,000 advisers. Had he followed a long-range policy plan rather than an understandable concern for his image as a result of the Bay of Pigs fiasco, he might have reduced rather than increased the Viet Nam commitment." What kind of comfort is that? If we are involved in a war over jungle real estate halfway around the world, it is at least better that the President thinks it is essential to

---

Ronald Steel is the author of The End of Alliance *and a study of American interventionism,* Pax Americana, *to be published this spring.*

the country's interest than because of "an understandable concern for his image." If Kennedy had worried a little less about his image and a little more about the limitations on the national interest, Americans might not be dying in Viet Nam today.

The Bay of Pigs was a fiasco, but Viet Nam was a national disaster, and Kennedy cannot be absolved of blame for it. Perhaps he never would have involved us so deeply, as the authors suggest. But it is equally possible that image problems would have involved him ever deeper in the morass of Saigon. It was Kennedy, after all, who decided that the U.S. government could no longer tolerate Ngo Dinh Diem as ruler of South Viet Nam, and who in 1963 gave the green light for his overthrow. Yet on the eve of the generals' coup, Diem capitulated. "Tell me what you want me to do and I will do it," he told Henry Cabot Lodge. "If you don't know what you want me to do, cable Washington for instructions and then tell me. I will do whatever you want me to do." But Washington did not know what it wanted Diem to do. The next day he was murdered by his own generals so that the war against the Viet Cong could be waged more effectively. The Viet Cong was then being contained by the South Vietnamese army and 15,000 American advisers. Today only 400,000 American soldiers are preventing the Saigon regime from collapse.

The authors excuse Kennedy a lot and Johnson very little. Pages are devoted to the gaffes of LBJ, and some of these are extremely funny. Yet somehow none are quite so devastating as the explanation of why Kennedy turned down David Bruce for Secretary of State. "A member of the President's family," the authors observe deadpan, "reported that Bruce and his wife, Evangeline, staunch Stevenson fans, had broken into tears when Kennedy was nominated and later elected. Kennedy removed Bruce from his list." Compared to this kind of pettiness, Johnson seems magnanimous. Or at least a paragon of self-restraint, since we are told that Kennedy—unlike Eisenhower and Dulles —never consulted Johnson on matters of foreign policy. "I feel bad about Lyndon because he is miserable in that job," he is quoted as saying. "But when a problem blows up, I never think of calling him because he hasn't read the cables."

Like good sensitive liberals, Weintal and Bartlett are offended by the crudeness of the Johnson style, and look back with nostalgia upon the New Frontier, when Pablo Casals played in the White House and intellectuals found a "tolerant, yeasty climate" in which their ideas could ferment. Yet the qualities of leadership which they admire, as a much-needed antidote to the hazards of accidental diplomacy, were rather less evident in Kennedy than they are in Johnson. They praise the luminaries of the Administration's foreign policy team (composed almost entirely of Kennedy appointees), and explain its failures by commenting: "If there is one reason why a team of such brilliance and ability has not functioned more effectively, it is lack of leadership. President Johnson, primarily attuned to the domestic scene, has not yet shown his willingness to exercise it." Did Kennedy? The authors are mute on this point.

Aside from their myopia about the shortcomings of Kennedy as a diplomat, Weintal and Bartlett have written an absorbing and eye-opening account of crisis diplomacy as seen through the keyhole. This book deserves attention for showing how the United States has become involved—either accidentally, or to overcome unfavorable "images," or from a mistaken concept of the national interest—in crises it could not resolve and which affected its real interests only dimly. While their prescription for firmer Presidential leadership and more formal advisory machinery may be too vague to be of much help, their vivid portraits of brinksmanship are as disconcerting as they are fascinating. Surely a nation embarked upon a global mission should have some better concept of what it is up to.

Blunt instruments

By Geoffrey A. Wolff

THE ACCIDENTAL PRESIDENT. By Robert Sherrill. Grossman. 282 pp. $5.

R. F. K.: The Man Who Would Be President. By Ralph de Toledano. Putnam. 381 pp. $6.95.

Add two more titles to the growing bibliography of polemic against the President and his likely successor in 1972. The attack on Bobby Kennedy comes from the far right. Ralph de Toledano has worn political coats of many colors but the one he wears today, as a columnist and contributor to *National Review* and *The Reader's Digest*, is threadbare and very conservative. Robert Sherrill, on the other hand, is what de Toledano would call a radical peacenik. His philippic against President Johnson is incomparably better written and livelier than de Toledano's listless, flinching attack on the Senator. Sherrill, who worked a number of years in Texas for *Time* and now writes regularly for *The Nation*, has assembled an often persuasive and devastating anti-Johnson kit, totally unrelieved by compassion or extenuation. "My purpose in writing this primer," he tells us, "is to help others enjoy Lyndon Johnson." He assures us *The Accidental President*, written in a non-campaign year, is a "non-campaign book." The Texan is portrayed as a one-time lackey of the oil lobby, a betrayer of Liberal principles which he pretends to support, a cruel and savage bully, a whiner, a warmonger, and a liar. Sherrill's concluding estimate of the man is wholly damning:

> His ego has stifled all but the stoutest, or the dullest, or the most recalcitrant souls in Washington. He has commanded far more fear than loyalty. And the legislative program which once passed for vision has now degenerated into puff and pork barrel. The strength that Johnson could have used for great humane achievements is becoming excessive, as the old cycle catches up with him again: great promise, over-ripeness, spoilage.

Sherrill begins his book with sneers at Johnson's crudeness of sentiment and expression, his cornpone manners, and becomes more acrimonious as he is overcome by moral and ideological outrage. He acknowledges, as everybody does when discussing the President, that Johnson is a terribly complicated man with terribly complicated motives. Sherrill tells us early on that he is weary of tentative appraisals of the man: he wants to put the knife in the gut.

He quotes qualified judgment of Johnson by Ronnie Dugger, editor of *The Texas Observer*, and says of it:

> The perpetually balanced phrase, the swing and the rhythm of this kind of demeaning—Johnson is this but not that, this but not that; less flip than flap, flap than flip; too much this, and this, and this—has a way of piling up in great spirals until it topples, and the reader comes away dizzy, and suspecting that accuracy was the victim of style; but it is the contradicting qualities of the man, not the necessary balancing and telescoping of phrase, that is to blame.

Nonetheless, no qualifications for Sherrill. His rhetoric is uniformly savage: "Throughout his career in the Senate, in fact, Johnson's record was that of a typical Southerner, voting against the wops, gooks, wogs and spics of the world." Of the war in Viet Nam, the war that may cost Johnson the Presidency? "It *is* his war. Not since William Randolph Hearst and Theodore Roosevelt combined talents to produce the Spanish-American War has a major conflict been so deliberately contrived." Why? To increase prosperity through defense contracts and relieve the heat of domestic political demands. "Johnson needed a war that would last a while. A half-dozen Dominican Republic-type flurries would not do. He needed a war that could be held in check, yet stretched to any desirable term, escalated and de-escalated at will." Such gratuitous and irresponsible conclusions damage what is otherwise a highly effective dismantling of the elaborate mythology of Johnson's Populist instincts.

Sherrill shows him to have a history of wavering, now honeying up to the people, now to the power. A wealth of quotations and anecdotes, most of which have been in common circulation for some time, are advanced to reveal a martinet, overcome by lust for popularity yet incapable of showing generosity or affection for his colleagues; a man compelled to secrecy because he cannot articulate or justify a policy until it is translated into action, *(Continued on page 15)*

Geoffrey A. Wolff is book review editor for The Washington Post.

Blunt instruments

(Continued from page 5)
and then, not explaining, but petulantly attempting to justify it.

Sherrill's language can be raw and insulting, but he lights it up now and again with marvelous conceit. Writing of Johnson's traditionally chummy relations with the Army and Navy and their champions in Congress, he refers to Senators Stennis and Eastland, "who swung like Romulus and Remus from the tits of the military appropriations bill, growing fat." But Sherrill is not being playful. He is sickened and alarmed by Johnson's effect on democratic institutions. Throughout his book Sherrill portrays the President as a manipulator who showers contempt on Congress, the press, and the people by lying to them. We don't, and may never, know whether Sherrill is right, but he believes that Congress' approval of the extension of the war to North Viet Nam was a product of Johnsonian hocus-pocus, a juggling of the facts of the Tonkin Gulf incident and the Viet Cong attack on Pleiku. Sherrill sees Johnson not as the expression of the people's will but as their ranch foreman. The author documents the President's evasions and lies and concludes: "The picture that grows out of all this is of a touchy tyrant who does not want anyone butting into what he considers to be his business, even though others judge it to be the public's business."

Finally, it is Johnson's greed for power more than his manner, or even his record, that compels Sherrill to attack him. It is not that his ambition has controlled his attitude toward Civil Rights or sent him snaking from the feet to the throats of Liberals; it is not even altogether that he has abused power; rather it is that he has so *hungered* for the power Sherrill feels he has abused. It is the appetite that offends:

> To be able to say to one man go, and he goeth, and to another man come, and he cometh; to be able to get the same response from whole nations; the open-end whim, the chance to change one's mind, and then flip back again, without apologizing; to be as secretive, and petulant, and arbitrary as a Nero; to go forth and proclaim, and withdraw and counter-mandate—it's a great life for the well-to-do burgher's son from Johnson City, able to keep whole kingdoms on edge.

De Toledano's action is so rear guard and tentative, so dispirited and defensive, that it almost makes the would-be President lovable—no mean accomplishment. Like Sherrill, he begins his book with a thesaurus of damning quotes, but many of them are so irrelevant and petty that they work in reverse. Many of them, also, are humorous badinage reported deadpan by the indignant de Toledano. Lack of wit is a serious handicap for a polemicist and de Toledano doesn't survive it. Scoop: want proof that Bobby is hateful? Hear this damnation out of Jackie Kennedy's mouth: "I sometimes wish that Bobby, because he is so wonderful, had been an amoeba and then he could have mated with himself." To confirm your suspicions that Joe Kennedy bought the election for John F. Kennedy, de Toledano ritually trots out the famous telegram: "I won't pay for a landslide." Bobby is irresponsible and crude: people got thrown in his swimming pool at parties and his dog has the run of his dining room.

But what Bobby really is guilty of, in de Toledano's eyes, is being soft on Communism, a conclusion that will come as a surprise to some people. De Toledano reminds us, to prove it, that Bobby spent a summer studying under the "socialist and then determinedly fellow-traveling Professor Harold Laski at the left-leaning London School of Economics." Besides, he deserted Joe McCarthy's witch-hunt as the good old days of security-consciousness were coming to a close.

The book is as ill-organized as it is irresponsible. It is long on the minutiae of hearsay but shies away from putting anything in context. Why did Bobby leave the McCarthy committee? Forgetting the gist of his attack, de Toledano tells us the resignation was motivated only by Bobby's jealousy of Roy Cohn's high position. And if Bobby's power was then so limited, how could his departure be construed as a blow struck for Communism?

The strongest point in de Toledano's stale catalogue of grievances is his charge that Kennedy illegally and sadistically hounded Jimmy Hoffa, and that the methods of the McCarthy investigations, so reprehensible to Liberals, were applauded when directed against hoods by the McClellan committee. But he makes little of the point and the challenge is deadened by his return to innuendo and old editorials.

It is clear de Toledano fancies himself something of a phrase-maker. He begins a chapter: "Politics is the daughter of history, unkempt and illegitimate, but with a wanton attraction that few men can resist." The wanton attraction for de Toledano is lodged in precious prose, the unkempt and illegitimate daughter of poetry. Another chapter begins with the solemn observation: "Death is never kind, nor can philosophy quench its sorrows." Such nonsensical phrase-making is almost amusing when de Toledano puts it to work in praise of J. Edgar Hoover, "scrupulous guardian of our civil rights."

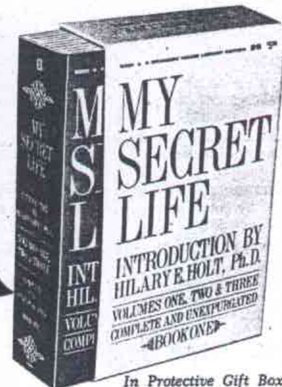
But he is not in the least amusing when he turns to half-truths and indirect accusations to belabor the Kennedy record. JFK "was as much a victim of the war with Communism as any of the unknown men and women who were shot down at the Berlin barrier, in Korea, or along the curtain of destruction which the Communists had lowered around their empire." President Kennedy, de Toledano alleges, sold his country out during the Cuban Missile Crisis by making a deal with Khrushchev: we dismantled our bases in Turkey and Italy in exchange for a reciprocal disengagement in Cuba which Russia violated.

De Toledano's book is a travesty. He leaves undocumented the many points that could and should be added to Bobby's debit column. He gouges him for just those things that merit praise, such as his activist role in civil rights ("as violence racked the nation's cities he continued to speak in glittering and generalized support of more and more concessions to the Negro extremists").

Whatever the reason, it is clear that Robert Kennedy has touched the generation that will come of age by 1972. But de Toledano's comment on this is: "Bobby's failure to take the internal Communist threat seriously and to curb it by constant exposure and public disapproval contributed to the growth of the so-called New Student Left, thoroughly infiltrated and often completely dominated by Communist cadres which have operated in the privileged sanctuary of public apathy and government sloth."

With enemies like de Toledano, Bobby doesn't need friends.

Just Out in Soft Covers!



In Protective Gift Box

The Plain-Spoken Memoirs of an Improper Victorian

A Brandon House Library Edition

Introduction by Hilary E. Holt, Ph.D.

★ **"A treasure house of information about nineteenth century sexual mores"** —The London Times

★ **"A buried classic"** —Max Eastman

★ **"Most important document of its kind about Victorian England"** —Steven Marcus (The Other Victorians)

★ **"Scope, candor, intelligence and objectivity"** —Elizabeth Janeway (N.Y. Times)

The anonymous author of MY SECRET LIFE, a Victorian gentleman known only as "Walter," wrote these private memoirs for his own eyes only. Because his instructions to destroy it after his death were disobeyed, social historians were provided with a most valuable sociological and psychological document that reveals the folkways of 19th century England as candidly as a Kinsey report—in simpler language.

MY SECRET LIFE is probably the rarest book ever printed. Of the original six copies privately printed only three remain—one in the collection of the Kinsey Institute. Hard cover re-issues sell for high prices. Now Brandon House is making facsimile-type reproductions available in soft covers—complete and unexpurgated, with original word forms—at a price that canny collectors can afford. Book One, containing the first three volumes (over 900 pages) is only **$5**

ON SALE AT YOUR FAVORITE NEWSSTAND OR BOOKSTORE

Or Order Direct from Publisher. Payment must accompany Your Order.

SPECIAL RUSH MAIL ORDER FORM

Regent House (Dept. BH) Post Office Box 9506, North Hollywood, Calif. 91609

Gentlemen: Please send me ...... copies MY SECRET LIFE at $5 per copy. (Plus 25c per order to defray handling & shipping costs. California residents please add 4% tax.) I enclose $........ as payment in full (☐ Cash, ☐ Check, ☐ Money Order). I understand that this offer is restricted to adults.

Name: .... ☐ I am over 21.

Address: ....

City, State, Zip Code: ....

SPORES-FERNS-MICROSCOPIC ILLUSIONS ANALYZED

Vol. I C. S. Hires

An inspiring, valuable book for nature lovers, artists and scientists in many fields.

Living ferns beautifully illustrated, cell structure, development—spore to maturity. Unique, 3-dimensional studies. Models, line drawings and photomicrographs clarify spore structure, with wall arrangements organized. New approaches to microscopic illusions. Simple, accurate terms.

580 pages, 1150 illustrations, 14 in color.
Price—$22.50. Send for folder to:

MISTAIRE LABORATORIES
152 Glen Avenue
Millburn, N. J. 07041