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# Clifford urged total Viet pullout by end of 1970

WASHINGTON—In December of 1969, just before Richard Nixon took office as President of the United States, Secretary of Defense Clark Clifford held three long talks with Henry Kissinger. Clifford had a plan in mind.

He had in fact committed a plan to paper in the form of an outline for a speech which he hoped to persuade the new President to deliver.

As Clifford went over the outline with Kissinger, the new President would say that he had been elected—in part, at least—on a promise to end the war in Vietnam. He proposed to live up to that promise. He would then—according to the Clifford outline—detail the reasons for the decision he had come to, and announce it: he would bring most American soldiers out of Vietnam by the end of 1969: all of them out by the end of 1970.

It was Clifford's firm belief, he explained to Kissinger, that the war was unwinnable, partly because of the circumstances under which it had to be fought, partly because he had the gravest doubt that the people of South Vietnam wanted to win it. As he saw it, therefore, the only way out was out.

As everybody knows the speech went undelivered. Kissinger told Clifford he would try to arrange an appointment

with Mr. Nixon, but the call never came. Nevertheless, the undelivered address takes on special significance in light of the documents now made public for the McNamara record. The record suggests that McNamara could no longer main-

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tain to himself or to President Johnson the wisdom of pursuing victory in Vietnam. For reasons of loyalty, he felt he could not publicly say so, and he accepted a means of escape.

Clifford had no such choice. Within weeks after succeeding McNamara at the Pentagon, he had concluded that no matter how compelling the reasons for

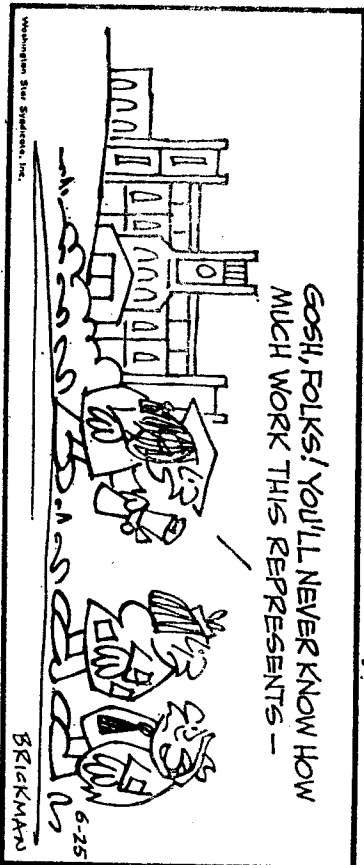
our entry into Vietnam, the project had now become a ghastly error, an invest-

ment so bad that there was no retrieving it by greater investment: that the only thing to do was to cut it, saving not the investment but the continued drain which the investment cost.

This was the position Clifford urged upon President Johnson with at least a modicum of success. President Johnson refused Gen. Westmoreland's request for 206,000 more men, cut the bombing back to the 20th parallel; finally stopped bombing North Vietnam. All these decisions indicated he had relinquished hope for victory and was turning to negotiations as a means of ending the war. Refusing to hear Clifford, Mr. Nixon

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took a different course. He would reduce the losses by maintaining the investment. His policy was predicated upon a conclusion exactly opposite of that reached by Clifford—mainly that the South Vietnamese government could be made self-sustaining.

Two and a half years have passed since these opposing conclusions were reached, and it would be surprising if during that time—and with the aid of millions of American dollars and many American lives—the government of South Vietnam were not stronger. But the grave doubt which Clifford had is the same grave doubt which haunts Americans now. Is the South Vietnamese government strong enough—even to protect an American Army in the process of withdrawal? So far President Nixon has been able to avoid the terrible choice which Clifford thought he had to make—the choice between going all in or going all out. But the time is coming when he may avoid it no longer. As American troops get down to some 75,000 to 100,000 men, they will be vulnerable. It is hard to imagine this nation conducting a Dunkirk and hard to imagine this nation returning to full-scale war. But if that choice should come, the President and all the rest of us may regret that the outline by the former secretary of defense remains an undelivered address.