Rostow Riding High on Strong Vietnam

intensity of Hanoi's support of the Vietcong, that 'Rostow Plan 6' became jocularly established in the contingency planning somewhere after SEATO Plan 5."

It was not, however, until February, 1965, that a new President, Lyndon Johnson, adopted that proposal. And not until last month did the President agree with the Rostow thesis that the North's oil supplies should be attacked.

In short, Rostow is now in his element. He is without doubt one of the key men in Government today, physically occupying the White House basement office long used by McGeorge Bundy before he went off to head the Ford Foundation.

Rostow as yet has neither the broad Presidential charter that Bundy had nor the power within the bureaucracy that Bundy exercised. But, if the Johnsonian compliments mean anything, he certainly is moving in that direction.

In fact, it is a case of a return to the beginning for Rostow. It began at the start of the Kennedy administration as Bundy's top assistant. In those days Rostow was the long-range thinker for the New Frontier (some, in fact, credit him with first suggesting that sobriquet to JFK when he was a campaign speech writer in 1960).

But when President Kennedy dumped Chester Bowles as Under Secretary of State in mid-1961, Rostow was shipped over to the State Department to be Counselor, and chairman of the Policy Planing Staff.

Too Much of a Hawk?

There he produced all sorts of long-range papers, but many in the Foreign Service considered him either something of a dreamer or too much of a hawk on Vietnam. The word got around that he wasn't to be taken too seriously and he seemed largely out of touch with the day-to-day crises that dominate the department.

Rostow found an outlet for his massive energies in Latin American affairs. In 1964 he became the American representative on CIAP, the Spanish initials for the Inter-American Committee for Alliance for Progress. His enthusiasm and optimism bubbled over to the point where—again—many felt he was unrealistic.

To understand Rostow, then and now, one has to know a bit about the man and his background. Now 49, he has an A.B. and Ph.D from Yale. A Rhodes Scholar at Oxford and a wartime major in the OSS, he was a professor of economic history at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology from 1950 until he came to the White House.

Schlesinger has aptly called him an "economic historian turned social philosopher." In 1959 Rostow wrote what the London Economist called "the non-Communist manifesto," a series of lectures which became a book on "The Stages of Economic Growth."

Some critics said his manifesto was as rigid as that of Marx (whom he once dubbed "a city boy" to explain Communist agricultural failures) because Rostow divided all the world's nations neatly into five stages of development.

Likes to Philosophize

Nothing delights the chunky Rostow, eyes beaming intensely through metal rimmed glasses, sleeves rolled up and hands clapsed behind his head, than ta lean back in his chair and philosophize. A lot of this sort of private talk later turns up on the lecture platform or between hard covers.

- The relative performance of India and China "may very well determine the outcome of the ideological struggle for Asia." (1955)
- "Communism is a technique for seizing and holding power in sick societies." (1957)
- "Dostrinally, Marxism is increasingly perceived as inefficient and reactionary, as well as profoundly inhumane." (1962)
- "This debate within the (Atlantic) Alliance is perhaps the greatest Constitutional question that this country has been involved in since we set ourselves up in the 1780s." (1963)
- "We are evidently at the beginning of the third major effort since 1945 to establish whether or not it is possible for the Soviet Union and the West to live together on this planet under conditions of tolerable stability and low tensions." (1963)

That word "tolerable" incidentally, is a Rostow favorite. It is the kind of a word that got him into an ironic fuss early in the Kennedy years with Sen. Everett M. Dirksen, the GOP leader. Some right-wing Republicans had jumped on reports about a secret Rostow long-term policy paper and Dirksen attacked him for "fuzzy thinking" because Rostow was said to believe that the Communists were "mellowing."

A Horse Laugh

This brought a horse laugh from everybody who knew Rostow, since his passion for both economic growth and anti-Communist guerrilla warfare has brought him the title of "Chester Bowles with machine guns." Rostow went up to the Capitol and convinced Dirksen et al that he was as tough as they about the Communists.

Indeed he is, though with a higher degree of sophistication. It was Rostow and Jerome T. Wiesner, later to be the Presidential science adviser, who told the Russians in Moscow seven weeks before the Kennedy inauguration that if they wanted better relations with the United States they had better release two American fliers without being asked and without attempting to

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bargain. Nikita Khrushchev did just that.

Rostow has been in the public prints mostly for his quotable prose. Once, however, he pulled a blooper with international repercussions. In Ottawa with President Kennedy in 1961, he carelessly left behind a secret memo on which the President had made some scribbled comments.

Prime Minister Diefenbaker angrily claimed the President had written "OB" beside a reference to him. The incident put a strain on Canadian-American relations, especially since Diefenbaker was correct.

But Rostow survived that blooper as he has survived the Siberia of State's Policy Planning Staff, the criticism of his economic theory, the scoffing at his ebullient prose, his hawk-like proposals and all the rest.

Last week Rostow was one of three officials dispatched by President Johnson to Los Angeles to sell the Administration's story on Vietnam. And characteristically, it was Rostow who did most of the talking to the sometimes skeptical governors and apparently to good effect.

For such reasons there is not much time anymore for tennis or swimming for Walt Whitman Rostow, a fellow who has come a long way from Oxford and MIT.