LOOK ■ DECEMBER 12, 1967 Volume 31, No. 25

THE DANGEROUS WORLD OF WALT ROSTOW

When faced with force, "you damn well use force." So says LBJ's most intimate foreign policy adviser. In the White House basement, this key architect of our Vietnam policy spins his controversial vision of the world.

By J. Robert Moskin
LOOK FOREIGN EDITOR

"I'VE NEVER HAD A MAN in whom I have more confidence than Walt," the President of the United States said. He sat tall in his rocker and fingered his glasses: "He's one of the finest counselors I've ever had around me."

Lyndon Johnson was talking about the problems of Presidential decision-making: "Nearly everything that comes in here is 50-50—and just as dangerous as hell. If it is 60-40, Rusk or McNamara has already decided it."

He got out of his chair, crossed the big, white, sunny office, and from his desk, picked up a single sheet of paper. He read aloud the top line: "Bombing of the Port of Haiphong." He went down a numbered list of reasons for bombing the North Vietnamese port and an equally long list against. He dropped the paper on the top of his desk. This, he said, is the kind of problem he has to decide.

The man who prepared that paper—and many others on which the President bases his decisions—is Walt Whitman Rostow, special assistant to the President for national security affairs and his most intimate adviser on foreign policy. Walt Rostow, although totally unknown to millions of Americans, is a highly important and controversial man.

This chunky 51-year-old ex-professor of economic history, whom the President lauds and listens to, has a key voice in American foreign policy. Frequently, the President is on the phone to him for 20 minutes, talking out ideas, listening to his advice. Johnson often writes "See me" on a Rostow memo, and they chew over the problem face-to-face. Rostow hears more of the President's views than any Cabinet officer. He is one of the four regulars—along with Secretary of State Dean Rusk and Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara—at the President's decision-making Tuesday lunch. There, the question repeatedly comes: "What do you think, Walt?" And Rostow usually knows precisely what he thinks: he has a thought-out vision of the world and America's place in it. U.S. foreign policy parallels that vision surprisingly.

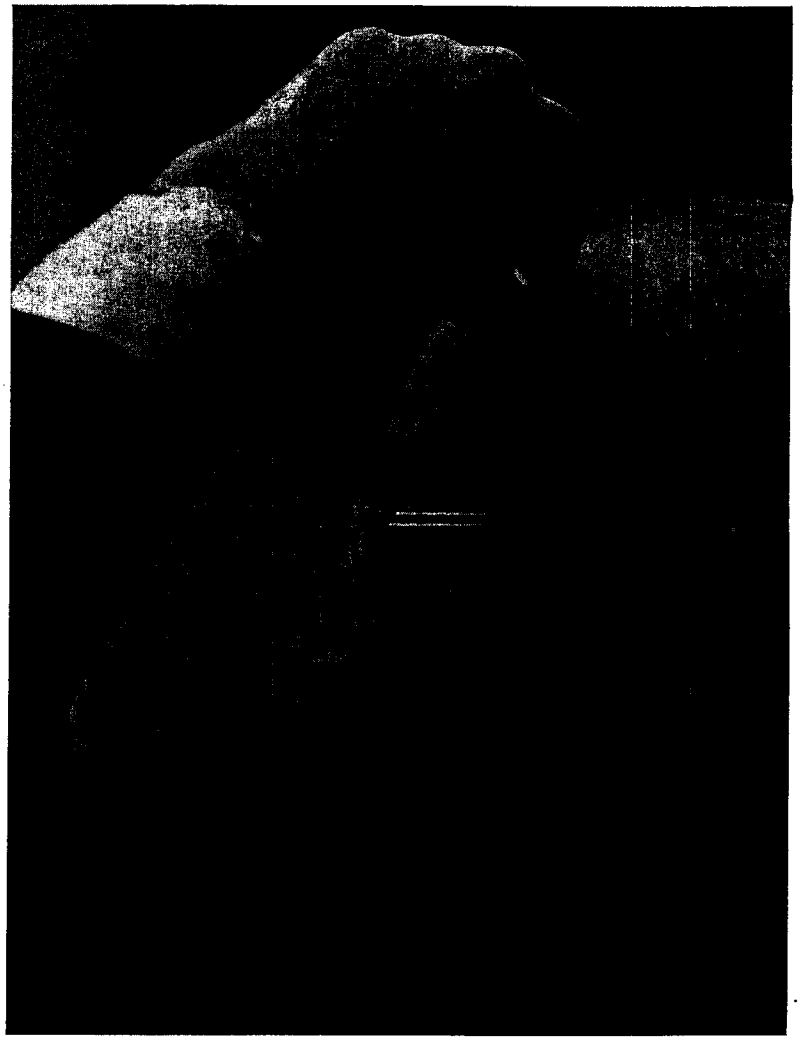
Rostow is universally accepted as one of the architects of our Vietnam policy. His critics—and he has many—call him the top "hawk" in the White House. Some accuse him of running a "filtration system" that screens from Johnson opinions about the war that conflict with Rostow's. Others hold him primarily responsible for our bombing of North Vietnam and claim he is a crusader for

"pain bombing," to exact a price in devastation and casualties. One former associate of both the Kennedy and Johnson administrations charges that without Rostow in the White House, the bombing would stop. He calls Rostow "the most dangerous man in America."

But his biggest fan is LBJ, who says, "His detractors raise him in my estimation every day." Johnson adds, "I have more confidence in his character, in his diligence. If somebody has to pick up a bucket, he goes get it. He's just a hell of a good man. I'm glad I got him. When called upon, he's a man of conviction who doesn't try to play President."

After the Tuesday lunch, Rostow dashes back to his office, a onetime coal bin in the White House basement. He grabs cables red-flagged for action, throws his jacket over a chair, summons his long-serving secretary, Lois Nivens, and Bromley K. Smith, the extraordinary civil servant who is executive secretary of the National Security Council, and fires off directives and telephone calls. He ends a call with: "It will be done!" hits the phone button with the eraser on a yellow pencil and picks up the next call without time for a "Goodbye." When the paroxysm is over, he sits back and lifts his bifocals high on

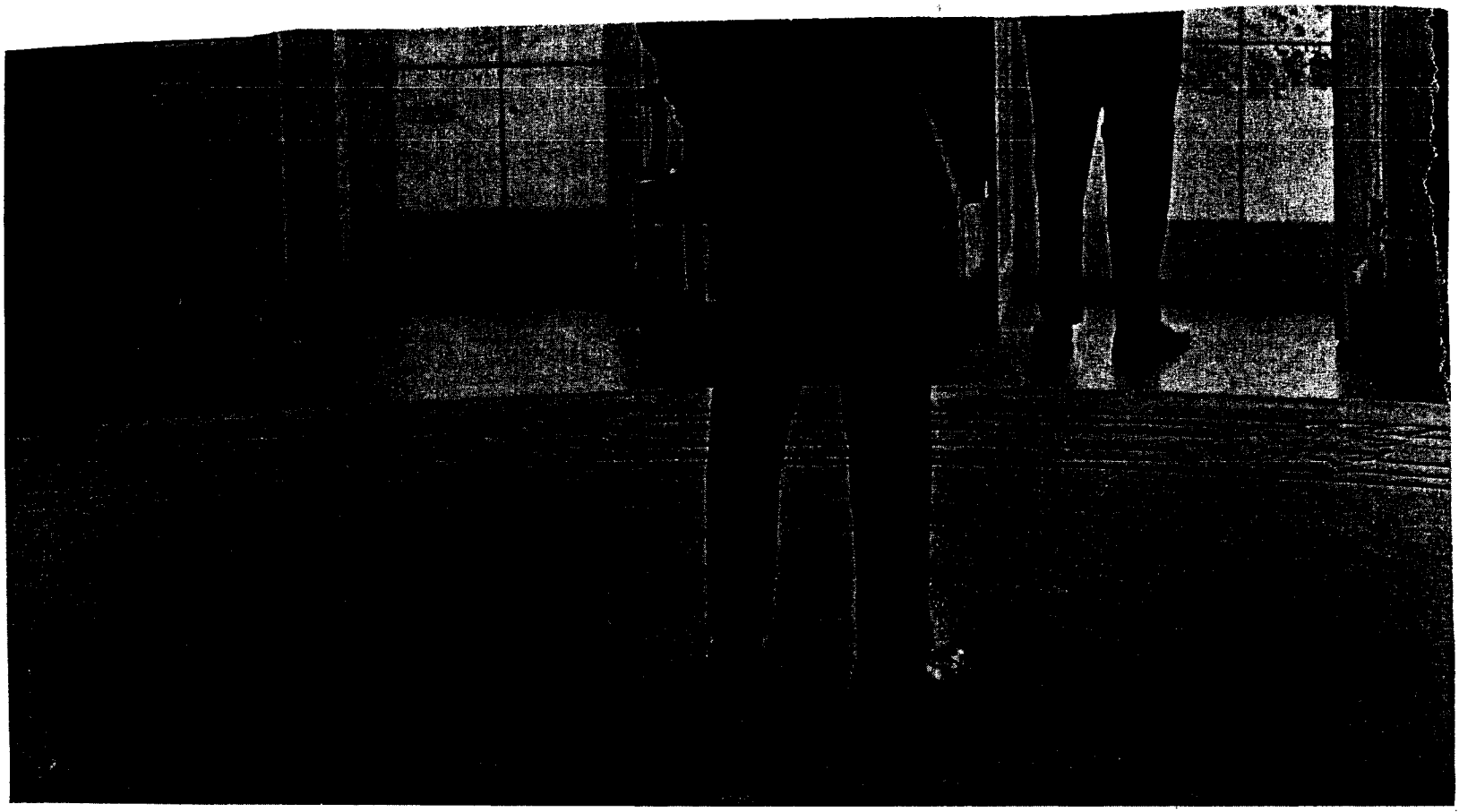
continued



"A man of conviction," says the President. A "dangerous man," say his critics. Walt Rostow says simply: Our country is "in mortal peril"; to survive, we must be crusaders.

ROSTOW *continued*

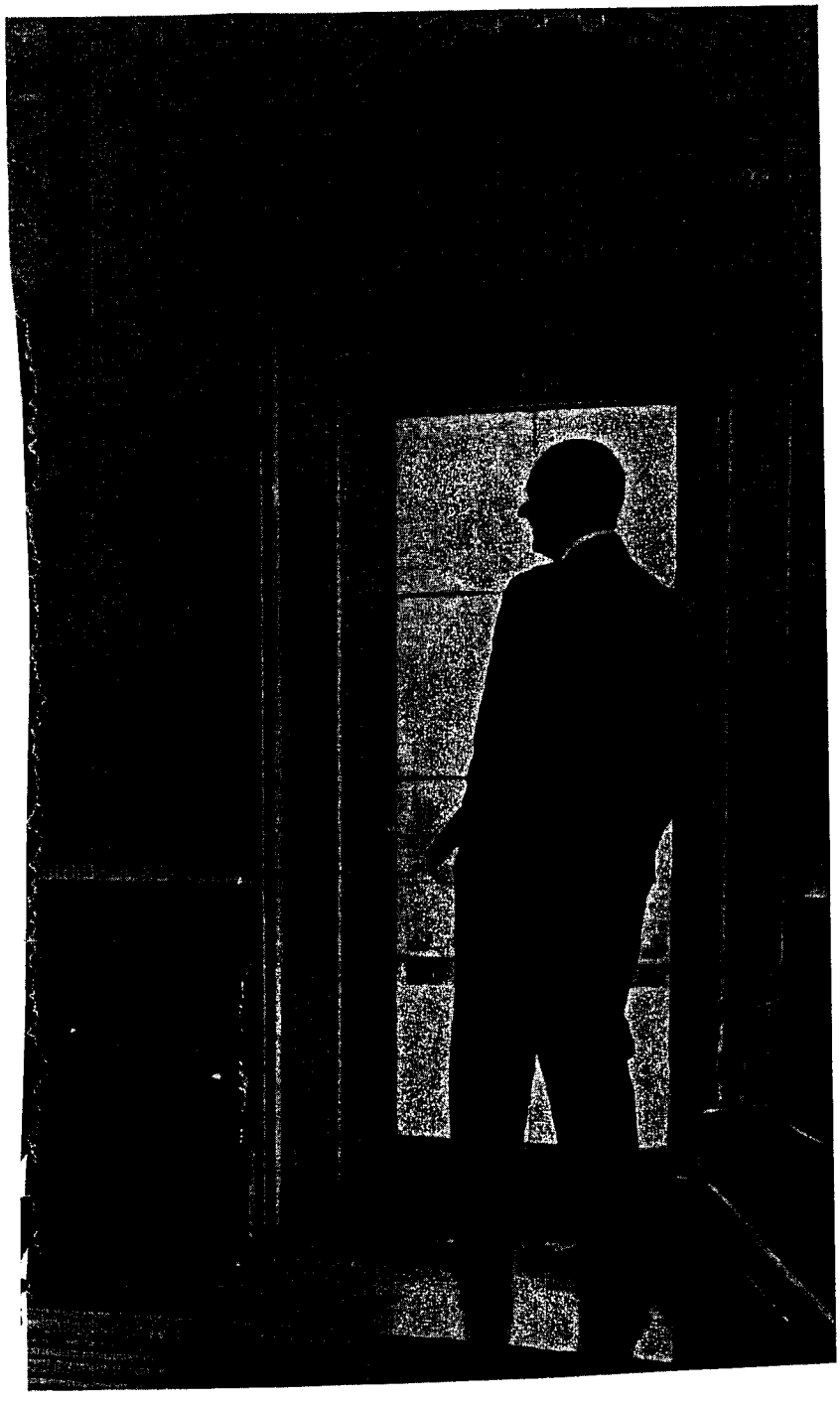
"If we pulled out of Vietnam and saw the dominance of Asia by a single power, we

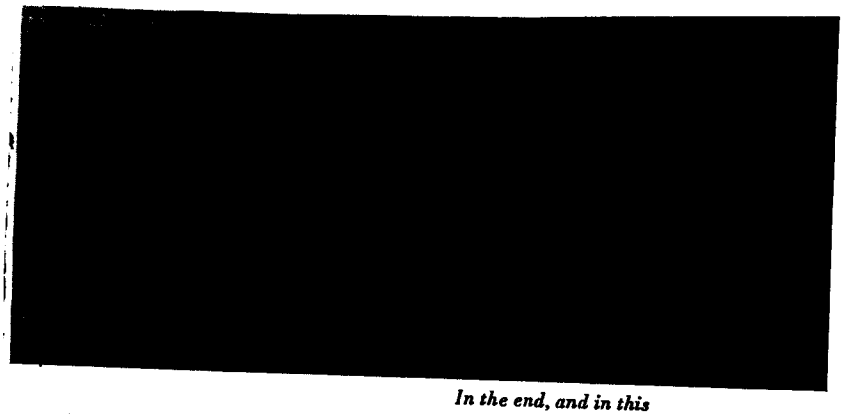


The tension of decision-making crowds the President's quiet office. Rostow waits as the President and the Secretary of State talk out a complex problem he has lobbed up to them.

Peering at the Rose Garden without seeing it, Secretary Rusk ponders what he will recommend to LBJ. Much of Rostow's time is spent bridging between State and the White House.

would probably have a bigger war."





In the end, and in this room, the President alone decides. He weighs the judgments of his Secretary of State and his staff adviser, and then must say yes or no.

his head. His light-gray eyes smile easily as he explains, "I've just debriefed 'the Town.' We transmit out to the Town the President's decisions. They count on me to let them know the President's view as well as tell him their view." The Town —official Washington—knows this is the President's man, reporting precisely what The Man wants done.

Rostow's job, he says, is to "live with problems filled with razor blades." He forces the pace throughout the Government. He sucks in information the President, imprisoned in the White House, needs for his decisions. He's a man whose word the President feels he can trust precisely.

Precision is a battle Rostow fights every day. When he moved to the White House in April, 1966, from the chairmanship of the State Department's Policy Planning Council, a lot of people around Washington figured LBJ wouldn't long have the patience for his full, professorial reports. Replacing McGeorge Bundy, now president of the Ford Foundation, he followed a sharp, snapping-turtle mind into the White House slot.

Rostow has learned to produce the concise memos LBJ likes. The President says: "This man states it out for you as you want to hear it, and to give you both sides of it. And then you ask him his judgment, and he'll give it to you without trying to market or sell it."

PRECISION IS MORE than brevity. Rostow must make sure the President knows precisely: a) what the issue is that he will have to consider; b) what everyone's views are about it, and c) what are the President's choices for decision and action. Says Rusk, "Bob McNamara and I can't go running over there every ten minutes of the day with papers in our hand." And he adds of Rostow's job, "He helps frame the questions and clarify the issues that need determination." *When* an issue is brought to the President and *how* it is framed can be vital.

"They scream about a Little State Department here. We would be one man and a motorcycle if they did their job," says one White House official. Rostow must dish up not only the bureaucracy's recommendations but "crank in" the President's own political interests and give him *all* the options. Under Secretary of State Nicholas deB. Katzenbach, chairman of the new Senior Interdepartmental Group, says, "Part of the job Walt is doing ought to be done here. I'd like to do him out of a hunk of his job, and I think my strongest supporter would be Walt."

The need for precision gets even more urgent when the man in Rostow's position has his own strong views. And Rostow does. He has unending opportunities to flesh out his arguments in person with the President. As Bundy says, "The guy who carries that kind of traffic is either good enough so you want his advice or he's not good enough to carry the traffic." In this post, Bundy knows, "You don't screen out the views of people with responsibility. It gets more complicated when you volunteer information to the President. You get awfully steamed up about a problem, and it seems more important to be right than fair. Nobody's perfect at that. Nobody."

Rostow is acutely aware that his usefulness would be finished if key men felt that he was too often getting between them and the President. Some do, of course, but with Secretary Rusk, for one example, Rostow has designed a smooth way of working. He always shoots over to Rusk a copy of any memo he sends up to the President giving his views about a State Department report. "I have to put a personal recommendation on it," Rostow says. But, "There's no paper I send up to the President that I wouldn't have my colleagues in the Cabinet see."

Rusk and Rostow have been in this business together for nearly seven years. When they both came to Washington in 1961, Rostow was earmarked to go to the State Department as head of policy planning, but Rusk chose George C. McGhee. Rostow caught on as Bundy's deputy in the White House, with special responsibility for Southeast Asia.

Recently, Rostow's name made headlines when a dismissed State Department security officer was reported as blaming his discharge on his refusal to clear Rostow at the beginning of JFK's term without a field investigation. Bundy says, "I read that file in 1961, and there was nothing in it that raised any question at all about Walt's loyalty, security or other qualifications." He says he accepted Rostow with "three cheers."

Kennedy continued to think of Rostow as a brain. In "The Great Shake-up of November 1961," when Chester Bowles was moved out as Under Secretary of State, McGhee moved up, and Rostow landed in the policy-planning job he had missed first time around. He stayed there until Johnson, reportedly turning aside men like Bill Moyers or Robert Komer, either of whom the press might call a second Secretary of State, brought Rostow back.

At that time, insiders recall, Rusk's initial wariness had worn off, and he strongly recommended Rostow for the White House assignment. Rusk says, "It was not unfamiliar country to him. He was already entirely familiar with the flow of foreign policy business." Says Rostow of Rusk, "After we'd been in a lot of foxholes together, we became good friends."

Last June, during the Middle East war, Bundy was brought back to head a special committee in the White House and manage the continuing crisis through Rostow. There were many reasons for the special committee. Most important, Rostow had the war in Vietnam and a dozen other problems to follow; he couldn't pile this one on too. In addition, the President needed a center for quick reactions. Says Rusk, "It was im-

continued

ROSTOW *continued*

portant to have a top full-time man on this crisis." In some minds, there was also the realization that the President's representative in the U.N., Arthur J. Goldberg, White House foreign policy adviser Walt Rostow and his brother, Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Eugene V. Rostow, in charge of the Interdepartmental Control Group on the crisis, are all Jews. And finally, some people wanted to prevent pro-Arab officials in the State Department from getting control of the problem. In all, as Bundy recalls, "The President had a very hot potato there—one more hot potato than the system needed."

The roots of the LBJ-Rostow relationship go back to 1961, when they both made trips to Vietnam for Kennedy—Johnson in May and Rostow in October as deputy to Gen. Maxwell D. Taylor. Even before going, Rostow advocated that we use counterforce in Vietnam.

His trip fortified Rostow's conviction. He concurred in Taylor's report, which said: "the time may come . . . when we must declare our intention to attack the source of guerrilla aggression in North Viet Nam and impose on the Hanoi Government a price for participating in the current war which is commensurate with the damage being inflicted on its neighbors to the south."

Ever since, and especially after North Vietnam violated the 1962 agreements on Laos, Rostow has favored imposing a price on the North. His faith in systematic bombing goes back to World War II, when he joined the OSS and worked in London and France as secretary of the U. S.-British "Jockey Committee," which was charged with planning the bomber targeting of oil supplies, factories, bridges and rail lines.

General Taylor's 1961 recommenda-

tions to put more American troops on the ground in Vietnam and to counterattack the North became U. S. policy. It has led to a land war on the mainland of Asia. Rostow still strongly supports the policy he helped design.

This conviction is based on Rostow's special vision of the world. Although no one can separate out how much his thought has influenced other men's minds directly, it supplies the understructure on which are raised the President's policies.

Rostow has been constructing his view of the world all his thinking life. His father, who came to New York from Russia in 1905 to study metallurgical chemistry, was an anti-Communist Socialist. At home in Irvington, N. J., and New Haven, Conn., the three Rostow boys were taught to be concerned with social problems and seek non-Communist answers. These same leanings led their parents, who had met at a Socialist Sunday school in Brooklyn, to name their Flatbush-born middle son after the American poet. His older brother, who became dean of the Yale Law School and is now No. 3 man in the State Department, was named after labor leader Eugene V. Debs, and his younger brother, now in business in Ann Arbor, Mich., was named after philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson. Says Eugene Rostow, "It was a very talkative family, a very good family to grow up in."

At the age of 17, Walt Rostow vowed to find an answer to Marxism. As a Phi Beta Kappa scholarship student in Yale's class of 1936—and later as a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford—he remembers: "I read Marx and said these are great questions and bad answers. I said I would do better. I waited 24 years and finally did it, and it is better." In an influential little book called *The Stages of Economic Growth*, he worked out a non-Communist explanation of how underdeveloped nations come to "economic maturity." Communism, he decided, is "a disease of the transition to modernization," and Communists are "scavengers of the modernization process."

He says, "I start by assuming this is an incredibly dangerous time, and crises will be endemic. Any damn fool can see this is an extraordinarily dangerous period of history."

HE SEES the United States standing "in mortal peril"—a comfortable, democratic island in a world where the strength of Eurasia exceeds ours. The turbulence in the world, he warns, threatens our ability to survive as a free and open society. A totalitarian, Communist world would force us into a "fortress mentality." He has written, "the American interest demands, in a sense, that Americans be crusaders. . . ."

The greatest threat, he says, would be realized if a hostile power or group of powers were able to dominate either Europe or Asia. He has long made the recently emphasized argument that our national interest is at stake in Vietnam. "I don't think the nation would sit by and see all of Asia pass to Communist control. This is a prediction," he says. "If we pulled out of Vietnam and saw the dominance of Asia by a single power, we would react and probably have a bigger war.

"There are people in the country, and always have been—notably when your commitments are put to the test—who turn out to be isolationists in the sense that they believe at least they would rather face the consequences of the loss of Asia or Europe than fight a war. My judgment about my country is it would not actually accept the full consequences of our pulling out of Vietnam and letting Asia go."

He calls the war in Vietnam a Chinese-inspired War of Liberation, "an important test of . . . Mao's method." He says, "The problem of Communist China is it's actively encouraging other groups to engage in aggression; and it itself has overt expansionist ambitions. The whole shape of Asia is involved. Asians know this." In his eyes, our essential conflict is with an expansive Chinese communism.

He denies that he is preaching an anti-Communist crusade: "We haven't used ideological convictions as reason for war. We are concerned with the attempt to extend power across international frontiers." He insists the war in Vietnam is the result of such an attempt: "The whole thing from the beginning was completely managed from the North. The general staff is in the North. This is a thoroughly organized aggression from the North. A mass of intelligence and captured documents makes this judgment sure."

He even suggests that the Communist leaders in Hanoi should welcome the American presence in South Vietnam as a counterforce to Communist China: "I have no doubt the men in Hanoi cherish their independence. I do not regard them in any simple way as puppets. On the other hand, if we left the Asian mainland, they would themselves be hard put to maintain their independence. . . . What made Tito possible? There was very close to him American power in Europe."

His opponents, including some important Democrats, regard Rostow as both arrogant and wrong. They argue that war pressures are forcing North Vietnam to become increasingly dependent on Communist China, that China is not expansive and that the Communist powers are too splintered to overrun Asia.

Rostow is convinced we can win the war in the South by reducing the percentage of the population under Vietcong control. He says it is already down from 40 percent to "well under 30." At the present rate of decline, it would reach 20 percent by March, but, he adds, "No one can tell where the breakover point is." At some stage, he expects, the enemy will not control enough people to support their soldiers in the South.

He has a reputation as an incurable optimist, and he does hold out great hope. He believes we are at a watershed where men can shape history. If we keep South Vietnam free from Communist domination, he predicts, "the struggle in Vietnam might be the last great confrontation of the postwar era. You can expect a lot of trouble, but if the Wars of Liberation fail where [they] had the maximum opportunity, it's not going to be very attractive to start elsewhere."

He is completely convinced we must stay and fight. "The bombing in the North is having an important attritional effect. They're under tremendous manpower strain. Their casualties are going up at a rate they cannot sustain," he says. "I honestly believe we are on a rising curve. I see light at the end of the tunnel. I can't tell when." He says the North can no longer hope to win on the battlefield; it hopes to win here in the U. S.: "The war now is about the United States. It's not about Vietnam any longer from their point of view."

Although "doves" would not agree with Rostow's thesis, he doesn't like to be labeled a "hawk." He explains: "We cannot deal with the world effectively unless we are prepared to acknowledge the reality of force. My view of force is that there are tragic occasions when it is the best alternative available." He says he spends more time on the problems of the economic development of Vietnam than on the uses of force there. "If 'dove' means using your imagination to find ways the war might be brought to an end in an honorable way without force, then I'm a dove." But faced with force, "then you damn well use force."

In facing the fact of force in the world, Rostow also insists we cannot regard nuclear war as unthinkable. "Nuclear deterrence is not just a matter of hardware but of will," he says. "The essence of deterrence is that the other side will not act because of fear that the act will lead to nuclear engagement. To make that conviction credible is the hardest task ever laid on a human being. From the crises I've seen—Cuba in 1962 and Berlin—the only way that conviction can

be conveyed is if the President of the United States is prepared to contemplate nuclear war, if in fact the President has stared down this route."

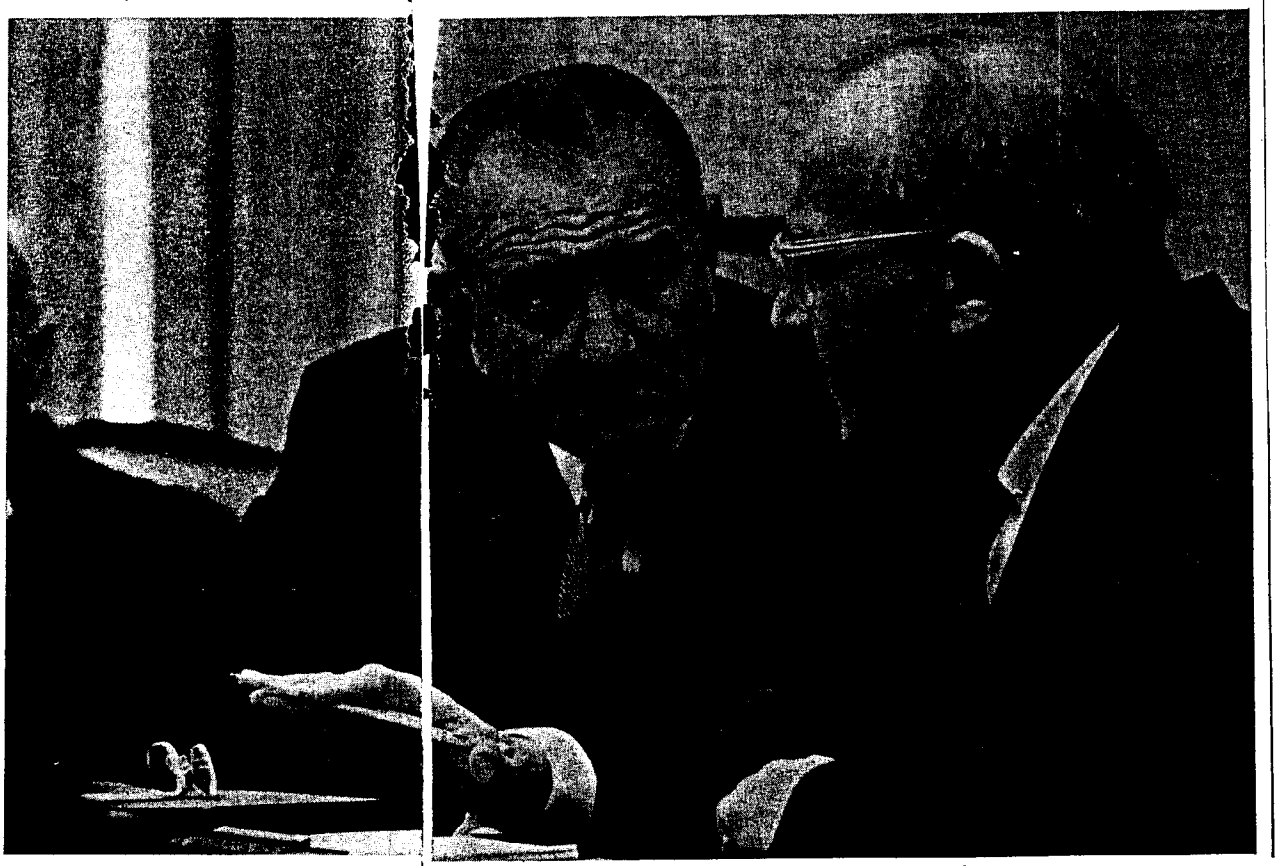
Talking of the dangers he sees and today's younger generation, he says thoughtfully, "They may think of it as seeing Hitlers or Stalins under every bed. I only hope they perceive that the task is a long task. We certainly, in our time, are not going to achieve, totally, world order. That will remain central to our agenda and theirs."

Rostow's world is studded with crises, but it hasn't always been that way. He started out as an academician and is one of the few Americans to be a professor at both Cambridge and Oxford. He once played semipro baseball in New Haven and now hits an intense game of tennis at 7:30 every other morning before going to the White House. On "no tennis" days, he is in his office by 7:25. He played clarinet and piano in a high school band and still writes music for popular songs. He proudly lays claim to the only song ever written on Air Force One—with words by James Symington, U. S. chief of protocol.

In 1937, he received a fellowship to a summer school in Geneva and met Elspeth Davies, a student leader from Barnard College. They bicycled a lot that summer and after the war were married. In addition to rearing Ann, 12, and Peter, 15, she teaches full-time at American University, and occasionally at the Foreign Service Institute and the National War College.

Of their life in Washington, Rostow says, "We try to do our job and keep out of debt, and it's a hard thing." On his wife's checkbook is pasted a gentle reminder: "You don't have to work for the Federal Government." President Johnson expresses a special regard for Elspeth Rostow, calling her "a stimulating, very intelligent, very wise woman."

After World War II, Rostow worked as an economist in the State Department and then for Gunnar Myrdal in Geneva. He evolved a strong faith in



Intent and determined, President Johnson listens as the man he calls one of his finest counselors spells out an approach to a gritty foreign problem. Rostow has advised three Presidents.

regionalism to stimulate economic development across national boundaries.

Rostow spent most of the 1950's at MIT, teaching and studying the economics of the underdeveloped and the Communist nations. He evolved the theories of economic growth that are his most important intellectual contribution to date. On the side, he advised President Eisenhower on a variety of problems. When he leaves government, he hopes to do parallel research on the growth of political democracy in these same underdeveloped nations. In the 1960 campaign, Rostow worked on Kennedy's foreign and military policies. He gave JFK the phrase "get the country moving again," and Kennedy credited him with originating the "New Frontier" slogan. The invitation to join the Administration in Washington followed. He's been there on the inside ever since.

Rostow carried to Washington with him a book called *The Green Curve Omnibus* by Sir Ernest Swinton. It deals with a paradox that intrigues him. Rostow says, "You have two contrary imperatives in government: one to keep options open and the other to make sure decisions are made in time." The book contains a story that tells how British authorities in London, by failing to face a problem soon enough, caused disaster. If they had decided early enough to ship food to the garrison in the story, it could have survived. Says Rostow, "Sometimes by making decisions you widen the options."

"I'M THE FIRST person ever to call the President and tell him the hot line from Moscow is up," says Walt Rostow with a wry smile. He figures this gives him a spot in the record book of history.

The "hot line" is a teletype hookup between Moscow and Washington. We presume the Moscow terminal is in the Kremlin; no American has ever seen it.

Deep in the bowels of the White House is the Situation Room, a onetime bowling alley that is a shabby, overcrowded imitation of the Pentagon War Rooms where the Big Brass gather in moments of crisis. The Situation Room, directed by Rostow, actually consists of two rooms. The inner one is dominated by a long table on which sits a dial-less tan telephone with the legend: "Private Line President." This windowless Conference Room is where the action is.

Next door is the Situation Room itself, where a small group of panic-proof men attempt to keep tabs, instantly, on what is happening in the world. It is usual for the President to call in here about 3 a.m. and ask, "What do you have for me?" Says one of the men who work there, "He has a built-in alarm. He wants to know about the situation in Vietnam: mortar attacks, downed fliers and what's being done to rescue them."

Most of the tools are surprisingly old-fashioned. "We operate like the YMCA," says one aide. There are four teletype machines: AP, UPI, Reuters and one with information monitored from foreign broadcasts and newspapers. Connecting the "Sit Room" with the White House Communications Center, where the modern equipment is, are pneumatic tubes, like the ones that have whooshed money across department stores for generations. On one wall are four clocks—Washington time, GMT, Saigon and Presidential time, which follows the President wherever he may be. On a shelf sits a "three-eyed monster"—three small TV sets mounted together for watching the three networks. In a corner stand waist-high brown "burn bags," where messages are disposed of, and 27-inch-high red-and-white candy-striped bags for burning the most sensitive classified material.

At 0238 last June 5, a Monday, Duty Officer Ray Wotring in the Sit Room spotted an item on the monitor teletype that fighting had broken out in the Middle East. Wotring immediately called Walt Rostow at his home, where he has three direct White House phones. By 0300, confirming information was pouring in, and Wotring called Rostow again: War. "I'm coming right in," Rostow said.

At 0325, Rostow was on the scene. He called Secretary Rusk, who was already informed of the crisis. Bromley Smith, Arthur McCafferty in charge of the Situation Room and Harold Saunders, the staff man who has the Middle East "account," arrived in the next ten minutes. They studied the messages from Tel Aviv and Cairo, and at 0435, Rostow decided to awaken the President. Col. Robert N. Ginsburgh, White House liaison from the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, was pulled in. The log adds: "0500 All hell broke loose."

At 0759, the Communications Center rang the Situation Room: the hot line was coming up. This had never happened before. The message was heard first over a secure telephone from the Pentagon, then from State. Almost simultaneously, a pneumatic tube spit out a canister with the message on yellow paper in Russian. McCafferty translated it for Rostow. Another canister brought a translation from the Communications Center. The message said: "Chairman of the Council of Ministers Kosygin would like to know whether or not President Johnson is at your terminal."

Before a reply could be framed saying the President was on his way or Rostow —now with White House Press Secretary George Christian in Rostow's office five steps up from the Sit Room—could call the President in his bedroom, the next message started: "Please give President Johnson the following message. . . ."

By 0815, Johnson was in the inner Conference Room. He ordered coffee and four hot rolls from the White House mess. Rusk, McNamara, Ambassador to Moscow Llewellyn Thompson, Rostow and the President started preparing a reply. It was filed at 0847, one hour to the minute after Kosygin's first message had been sent.

Rostow says of that first morning, "It was a crisis the end of which certainly couldn't be seen the first day." He remembers, "The first day was air day. We had a tolerably clear picture of what was going on by breakfast." Once the Israelis gained air superiority, the critical questions were how to bring the war to a halt and keep the United States and the Soviet Union at peace.

Rostow's staff men manned the Sit Room around the clock: Smith and Saunders took one 12-hour shift, and McCafferty and Ginsburgh, the other. During the next two days, three messages arrived from Moscow, and three replies went out signed Johnson. Then, on Thursday morning at 1100, the first U.S.-initiated message was sent. We told the Russians that the U.S.S. *Liberty* had been attacked, and our planes were scrambling to assist her; we were not going to war. Says one man very close to the action: "This was the best use of the hot line."

During the crisis, 20 messages went back and forth between Moscow and Washington, keeping communications open and reducing the chances of a terrible mistake. The hot line worked.

END