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Rostow Likens War Policies of Presidents Kennedy and Johnson

By HENRY RAYMONT
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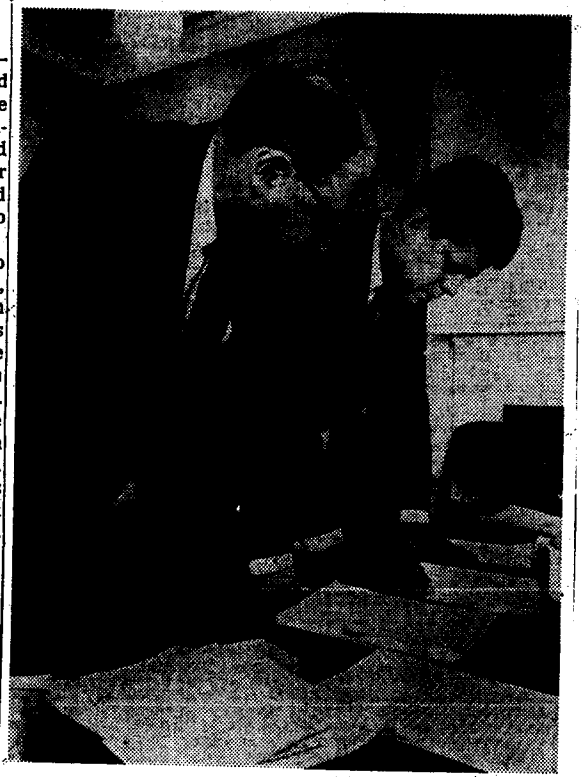
AUSTIN, Tex., April 19 — Walt W. Rostow says that had President Kennedy lived, he would have been forced to follow the same course toward escalation of the Vietnam war as President Johnson did, and possibly would have done so earlier.

Mr. Rostow, an adviser to both Presidents for eight years, has come to this conclusion after reflecting and studying his notes in preparation to write a book on military and foreign policies between 1958 and 1968.

In two long interviews in the office suite he shares here with former President Johnson, Mr. Rostow reviewed Washington's Vietnam moves since President Kennedy took the first steps toward increasing United States troop support in South Vietnam in 1961 "with the knowledge it might take him down a very difficult road."

"He didn't go into this thinking 'Well, it's just a few more chaps,'" Mr. Rostow declared. "He went into it because he said, 'I've got to hold Southeast Asia come hell or high water.'"

Mr. Rostow was a leading figure in the planning of counterinsurgency strategy for United States forces in Vietnam during the early months of the Kennedy Administration, and then became head of the State Department's policy planning board. From 1966 until last January he was President Johnson's special assistant for national security.



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Walt W. Rostow and President John F. Kennedy, early 1961

Discussing the Vietnam war and other foreign policy decisions by the Johnson Administration, Mr. Rostow appeared particularly sensitive to the contention of some liberal critics that President Kennedy would have de-escalated the involvement of United States troops and taken a softer position on other issues, among them the 1965 military intervention in the Dominican Republic.

"He wasn't about to do this," the former Presidential aide said. "He was very, very tough."

In fact, Mr. Rostow suggested that had President Kennedy campaigned against Senator Barry Goldwater in 1964 he would have responded more forcefully to the "military disintegration" of South Vietnam. Instead, he said, President Johnson considered it necessary to take a more moderate line in the face of the Republican candidate's belligerent posture.

"What the President of the United States faced in late 1964 and early 1965 was whether he accepted defeat in Vietnam and Southeast Asia- it had come to that point," Mr. Rostow said. "What would John F. Kenn have done? He would not have accepted defeat—and he might not have been as inhibited in dealing with Goldwater. He might have moved earlier."

Mr. Rostow also challenged the contention that Mr. Kennedy would have avoided using United States military forces in the Dominican situation, an issue frequently raised by the late Senator Robert F. Kennedy and his supporters.

President Kennedy, Mr. Rostow recalled, expressed to him early in 1961 a determination not to tolerate "another Cuba" in the Western Hemisphere.

Tells of Task Force

"I'll tell you one thing — I don't know if this is in the public record — but he was determined that there would not be another Cuba," Mr. Rostow said. "We had a small task force, of which I was a member, to find what would be the legal basis for using military power. That was Kennedy. So when people say he never would have done it in the Dominican Republic, you're goddamn right he would have!"

Mr. Rostow's comments amounted to his first answer to critics who have charged that by escalating the Vietnam war President Johnson departed from the policies of his predecessor.

A spokesman for Senator Edward M. Kennedy, the late President's brother, said last

an athletic man with thining silver hair and penetrating blue eyes. He was interviewed in his bright office on the top floor of the new nine-story Federal Office Building in downtown Austin. The interview, lasting four hours, took place Thursday and Friday morning after he had played his daily set of tennis.

The former Massachussetts Institute of Technology economics professor and author of the book, "The Stages of Economic Growth," from which President Kennedy borrowed the phrase "New Frontier," appeared stimulated by his return to an academic setting. He joined the faculty of the University of Texas on Feb. 1.

Mr. Rostow talked relentlessly about subjects ranging from the economics of underdevelopment to student protests and the state of the arts, stopping occasionally only to light a fresh cigarette.

Occasionally, he swung around on an orange swivel chair to face a huge plate glass window with a breathtaking northern view of Texas sky and landscape. It overlooks miles of rolling hills that surround the university where even critics of Mr. Rostow's hawkish position at the White House have accepted him as a respected colleague.

"Professor Rostow is doing a magnificent job not only by communicating his enthusiasm to the very young, but also to the experts on our faculty," was the judgement of Harry Ransom, Chancellor of the University.

Mr. Rostow in recent years has come under sharp attack from among some of his former colleagues in the Kennedy Administration who also opposed his hawkish posture. He was asked about this, and whether it meant that he had broken is previous allegiances.

"The problem is this," he replied after a pause. "That the image of Kennedy that they cooked up afterwards was cooked up by people who had very little to do with military and foreign policy. It was done basically for other purposes: to beat Johnson.

"The point about it is that I know an awful lot about the contours of President Kennedy's mind in 1961 when he made his decisions and I know what he said right down to the time just before his death. He made his flattest reaffirmation in 1963 of the domino theory and so on. I knew what he thought he was getting into in 1961 in a way I think that no other living person probably does."

Mr. Rostow left no doubt that his book on the last decade of major policy decisions, to be called "The Diffusion of Power," will represent a vigorous defense of the Johnson Administration as an expansion of President Kennedy's policies. The book will be published early in 1971 by The Macmillan Company, which is understood to have paid a $125,000 advance to Mr. Rostow's literary agent, Julian Bach Jr.

The title reflects Mr. Rostow's conviction that, more and more, the big powers will have to build a world of partnership and fair shares. In this connection, he said that President Johnson "did vastly more than people understand to build this alternative to isolation."

night that the Massachusetts Democrat would not comment on projections of his brother's policies. Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. and Theodore C. Sorenson, two former aides to President Kennedy who have written extensive accounts of his Administration, could not be reached yesterday.

Mr. Rostow, 52 years old, is