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ROSTOW UPHOLDS JOHNSON POLICIES

He Says Quitting Asia Could Have Meant Nuclear War

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, July 11 —

Walt W. Rostow said today that the alternative to the Vietnam policies of President Lyndon B. Johnson possibly would have been a nuclear war.

Appearing on the American Broadcasting Company's "Issues and Answers" television program, Mr. Rostow said in reply to a question that "President Kennedy and President Johnson arrived at a conclusion quite independently of me, which I share. Namely, that if we had walked away from Asia—and I would say if we walk away from Asia now — the consequences will not be peace, the consequences will be a large war, fairly soon, and quite possibly a nuclear war."

If one believes this, as he did, Mr. Rostow said, then "the pain was worth taking."

Mr. Rostow was an adviser to President Kennedy and special assistant for national security affairs to President Johnson.

Criticizes Series

Earlier today, Mr. Rostow held a breakfast meeting with a group of reporters and detailed some of his criticisms of The New York Times' recent series of articles based on the Pentagon study of the Vietnam war.

First, Mr. Rostow said, the Pentagon papers are "limited," and there is in them "no reflection of the President's mind."

Second, he said, the group of Pentagon civilian officials and military officers who worked on the Pentagon study had "axes to grind" and "threw in speculation." The Times, he said, quoted what was "most ax-grinding."

Third, he said, The Times' "headline writers, lead writers, editorial writers and columnists went beyond the Pentagon papers in purveying a sense of deceit by a President of the United States."

He he regarded The Times' "performance" in its series of articles "as the shoddiest piece of journalism since I had any experience of public life, in 1941."

Lists Charges

Mr. Rostow said he had three charges to make about The Times' articles.

The first, he said, was that the articles had represented what was only "contingency planning" in 1964 as "a prior and concealed decision to put U.S. forces into the war."

His second charge, he went on, was that the second article in the series on the Johnson Administration's decision to bomb North Vietnam asserted that the decision was made in September, 1964, and "was not implemented [until March, 1965] because of the election."

Finally, Mr. Rostow charged that the third article had termed the President's approval in April, 1965, of the dispatch of 18,000-20,000 additional support forces and two additional Marine battalions as a major decision to commit United States ground forces to battle. "The truth is," Mr. Rostow said, "he made this decision in July."

The Pentagon analyst had written that a consideration in delaying the bombing of North Vietnam was that "the President was in the midst of an election campaign in which he was presenting himself as the candidate of reason and restraint."

Mr. Rostow said that "from my own personal knowledge there is not the slightest evidence that the election determined in any way the decisions taken by the President."

The first sentence of the second article said: "The Johnson Administration reached 'a general consensus' at a White House strategy meeting on Sept. 7, 1964, that air attacks against North Vietnam would probably have to be launched, a Pentagon study of the Vietnam war states."

'Consensus Not to Bomb'

Mr. Rostow said that, on the contrary, at the September meeting there had been "a firm consensus not to bomb" because the political situation in Saigon was "too rocky" and it was not known "what waves of reaction there would be." There was, he said, a decision to "be ready to retaliate," if the President wished to do so, for any attacks on United States installations or South Vietnamese cities.

Mr. Rostow said that the President had decided to retaliate for an attack on the Bienhoa airfield on Nov. 1, and for a bomb attack on Christmas Eve on an officers billet in Saigon.

Mr. Rostow was asked why the President had decided not to retaliate for the attack on Bienhoa when he had reacted so strongly after the attacks against United States destroyers in August in the Gulf of Tonkin.

"I don't know," he said.