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LINES OF U. S. ACTION IN THE FAR EAST

by

Dr. Walt W. Rostow

There are several considerations which have led us, at M. I. T., at the Center for International Studies, to take the view that we ought to produce, when we do a research project of this kind, not only research, but also recommendations for action.

We think it is very likely indeed that unless one is forced to go through the exercise of discussing and considering problems of action, one may well answer the wrong questions, or not focus sufficient attention on the right questions.

The second view, which is almost a philosophical view, is this: that all research has implicit in it assumptions about action. In discussing Communist China it is impossible not to have in the back of your mind the problems of U. S. action, and we believe it is far better to have the research man's views laid out explicitly for all to examine and to criticize, rather than to leave them implicit in the way he has organized his alleged "facts," or in the way he selects certain facts as relevant and ignores certain others.

It is also our view that the policy views expressed in a finished project should be personal. That is, the Center for International Studies has no views about China; it is the man who takes the responsibility for the project who has the views; and he should be prepared to state these views at the end of his project. What M. I. T. and the Center does is say: "We have picked a man in whom we have a reasonable measure of confidence, not that he will come up with the ultimate answers, but he will be a man of integrity; and we give his views house room."

If there was any influence of our military past (and my own military past as an Air Staff Officer) in this project, it took

the form of knowing enough about what serious military staff work was not to try to get further into it than the information which we had.

Within these limits — the limits of this being a personal and partial view (which excludes the question of whether or not we should initiate major war against Communist China) — I shall now discuss the recommendations I made at the end of the China Project (incorporated in *An American Policy in Asia*.) I shall first read the short text out of the Summary of our own statement, and then I shall discuss each item in turn.

The first recommendation was the following:

“The effective military frustration of Communist China, embracing a determined effort to hold a maximum portion of Indo-China, envisaging not only the mobilization of conventional forces via SEATO, but also the development of local security forces capable of coping with limited insurrection and guerrilla activity.”

The comments I would like to make on that item are three. The first concerns Southern Vietnam. The Communists, and this goes very much indeed for Mao Tse-tung and the present leadership in Peking, think generally in military terms. Their political concepts are in many ways simply variants of general military concepts. From their point of view, they have driven in Northern Vietnam an important salient into our lines. It would be contrary to the basic doctrines on which they operate for them not to stay with that salient and try to force progressively a widening of it. They are unlikely to dissipate their forces. Put it another way, they are not likely to give up the advantage they have in Northern Vietnam, plus the extreme weakness of Southern Vietnam, cheaply. It is my feeling that we should meet them there with a really full-scale American effort; that we should do this first to try to de-

feat them — that is, to try to rally enough strength in Southern Vietnam, political and military, to shift the whole trend of the mixed politico-military battle that has gone on there for so long. But even if in the end we should lose Southern Vietnam, by one form of action or another, we must try to keep that salient and to keep the energies of the Communists focused there to gain time until a general Asian policy of the kind I am trying to describe is launched. A second Indo-Chinese failure by the Free World will be exceedingly serious. The ground on which we are trying to fight this curious political and military battle with the Communists is, indeed, difficult ground. They wouldn't be there unless the Free World position had been permitted to erode for a long time. Nevertheless, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, perhaps Malaya, and perhaps even Burma, may ultimately be at stake in this 'soft' area. Whether we can contain this salient and move on to consolidating a firm Free World base, or whether it gives and gives and grows out into all of Asia, depends in part on whether the Free World projects an image of itself as a force with power and policy capable of meeting and defeating the Communist wave of the future. And this must be done in the 'soft' area where the battle is now urgently joined.

The next observation that I would like to make goes back to my lecture the other day, when I tried to list the conditions and tasks that go with trying to hold ground in the 'soft' area. There are these four conditions, generally speaking: (1) you need strong local political leadership, capable of carrying out and giving the political foundation to counter-subversive policies and military policies; (2) When you have such leadership, you need certain specific lines of action to counter the Communists' efforts to weaken the area politically and to meet the subversive threat, both at the village level and the urban level; (3) You need effective minor military formations capable of coping with border difficulties and, especially, with guerrilla troops; (4) You need a general setting in Asia in which these men feel an assurance of support should

real war come — that is, should Chinese Communist troops cross the borders in open warfare.

It is only the last — that is, a formal guarantee that open aggression will be met with U. S. force — that we have yet satisfactorily installed in Asia. I take it to be the intent of General Collins and the American Mission in Vietnam, and elsewhere, to try to establish the other three.

The third comment I'd make is that the kind of job that needs doing in these 'soft' areas is in a good part a bilateral job; that is, it is a job that must be done in terms of intimate conditions on the ground — an attempt on the part of the United States to sort out and back the best men available with the chance of setting in motion an authentic local political movement, and a job in which general multi-lateral diplomatic treaties take you only a very small way. Nevertheless, I think that what the United States and the Free World are doing in Asia generally has an important bearing on the outcome. How the local Asians feel about the kinds of things we would like them to do hinges in part on a very large question — the whole Free World performance in Asia. "Who will win," they ask, "the Free World or the Communists?" "What does the United States stand for — not only here, but throughout Asia?" And the answers they form to these large questions are a living part of the local situation in every area.

Our second recommendation is this:

"A program of additional international investment in Asia, on a scale of about two billion dollars a year, for at least five years; to be accompanied by revised and expanded technical assistance measures. The purpose of this program would be to accelerate economic growth in underdeveloped areas — notably in India, Communist China's inevitable ideological competitor — and to provide an expanding regional economic en-

vironment within which Japan might find and sustain balance of payments equilibrium without substantial resort to trade with Peking, and without resort to substantial dollar grants."

In Asia, we believe that some such effort to expand the market environment for Japan is absolutely essential, and that some such program could marry up the two great weaknesses of Free Asian economy and make them self-reinforcing. By the two weaknesses, I mean the inability of the Japanese to find adequate markets and sources of supply for its imports and, on the other hand, the inadequate rate of growth — especially industrial growth — in India and some of the other areas.

The second observation on this point is the following: I believe that the lack of such a program in Asia is the single biggest missing element in U. S. Asian policy. The lack dramatizes what the Asian thinks to be a good many cross-purposes between the United States and themselves. For them, economic growth is not simply a part of economic policy. They want economic growth and they regard it as virtually their number one objective because they believe that their national independence, and their hopes for elevating the level of dignity of their individual citizen, depend upon economic growth. It is very hard, when one has examined the situation in those countries, not to understand that perspective.

For us, at least in their image of us, the number one economic goal is the military and security containment of Communism. From the American point of view, this is wholly understandable perspective. But it is not a perspective on the world situation which is going to permit us effectively to lead a world alliance that embraces Asia. They are, in Asia, much more likely to listen to our views on the menace of Communism, and much less likely to indulge in myopic and pious hopes about the good intentions of Communists, against the background of some such American economic program

in Asia. Not that we should establish any economic strings which would automatically link participation in economic programs to membership in SEATO. I don't think that would be acceptable; I think that would be rejected. But I would make a small bet, as an individual, that if we launched the kind of economic program that is envisaged here, we would have Burma in SEATO within two years — and this without anyone wringing the arm of the Burmese government. We might even be faced with the embarrassment, perhaps, of having Nehru in SEATO.

Be that as it may, I would make this possibly irresponsible statement merely to dramatize the view that what is involved here, in the lack of a really major American program, is of far greater importance for our security policy and our political policy than we normally concede to economic action.

The third point I'd make is about the competition with Communist China. I would commend to you this reflection on the present position of Communist China: that whether we like it or not, there is a competition in Asia between the Communists' economic performance in China and the Free World performance — notably in India. This competition will have its results over the next decade for history, whether or not we like it, whether or not the Chinese Communists like it, and whether or not the Indians like it. Nothing very dramatic is going to happen if we postpone for a year, or two, or five, in entering into this competition with the Chinese Communists by India. This is not a crisis like that provoked by Pearl Harbor or the invasion of South Korea; and it is, therefore, a bit harder to explain and to get political action in the United States. But, for what it is worth, it is my judgment that this competition is on; that it will have its consequences; that we will win, lose, or have some kind of compromise outcome on it, no matter what we do; and that on this outcome a large hunk of America's future security position in the world depends.

I now turn to the third recommendation:

“A program of diplomatic, political, and psychological action designed to bring the literate Asian into closer association with the Free World and its purposes, and to strengthen his will to resist various forms of Communist aggression. This requires an effective assertion of the Free World’s will to cope with Peking’s military pretensions, plus a persuasive demonstration of Free World’s concern and involvement in the great constructive problems of Asia’s modernization. It requires also that a concept of partnership within a responsible coalition suffuse steadily the day-to-day relations between Free Asia and the rest of the Free World.”

The first thing I would say about this recommendation is that it is, as with all forms of political or psychological warfare, difficult to pin down the kinds of actions you want to take other than those you would take in other fields of policy. There has been a wholesome tendency in Washington in the last few years, to which we have tried to contribute up at M. I. T., to debunk psychological warfare as a form of activity independent of normal military, political and social policy. Perhaps this has gone too far. But it is perhaps true that the biggest thing we need to do in psychological warfare in Asia is to launch the kind of economic program we have in mind; and to strike and hold steadily a stance in Asia which would convince the Asians that we were there as part of the Free World to stay, and that the Chinese Communists were not the wave of the future dealing with a ‘paper tiger.’ This kind of psychological reaction cannot be generated by words — it must be generated by actions which you sustain.

Nevertheless, there are a few things I think we might do which we are not doing, and a few things we might stop doing that we have done.

I think we have underestimated the possibilities and the importance of what might be called the 'battle of the books.' Those of you who have been in Asia, know better than I that the Communists have very effectively filled the bookstalls in many parts of Asia with cheap and accessible textbooks, propaganda designed to appeal to the literate Asian whom they know represent the elite who will largely determine the outcome of this political struggle. I think that more attention to making available books and writings which authentically reflect the perspective of the West would be helpful.

I think, too, that the West should realize that its ideas have not fully met the Communist challenge — notably in this field of economic growth, where the Communists have the model of the Soviet Union, and now Communist China, which represents a theory of economic growth in action; whereas the whole question of economic growth is one which has not concerned Western scholars and they have never tried to dramatize what it is the Free World has to contribute in this field. We grew, in the West, in a fit of absent-mindedness in the 19th Century, given our sound resilience, the capital available, and our natural resources. We don't seem to give the Asians the kinds of answers they need in this important field.

Now, the fourth point:

“A program of political and economic development on Formosa, designed to achieve the following results: to make Formosa a more stable element in Free Asia; to make Formosa a constructive center for overseas Chinese citizens of Free Asia; to make Formosa an effective spearhead in a sustained political offensive Communist China; to make Formosa an effective political, as well as military base against the day of internal crisis in Communist China or hot war. We believe that the United States should use its influence

on Formosa strongly to bring about these developments, and should develop methods of long-term working cooperation with the Chinese on Formosa at working level."

Here, our first view is that there is a large unexploited margin of influence that we can bring to bear on Formosa, and as nearly as we can make out — although they will bargain hard with us — the Nationalist leadership on Formosa expects us to exercise our influence. They wish to know, I believe, what our policy is in Asia, and where they fit into it.

If one concludes, as I have arbitrarily, the notion that we will initiate a major war, this means that we are working in such a way as to be prepared for war if the enemy should initiate it, but that our major task must include certain long-run political objectives; and that our Allies, including the Nationalists on Formosa, must look to the future with some other alternative in mind than being landed on the mainland within some short period of time. Therefore, they must face up to the elements in their position which make them something less than an optimum element in Free Asia. Specifically, they have a great task in making themselves a more effective center for the residual Chinese loyalties of the overseas Chinese citizens in Free Asia. Specifically, they should formulate a new program which would embrace all the non-Communist Chinese in Free Asia and in the Free World; and they should project this program for a new China out from their base on this island as a symbol for the future to the mainland.

No one can tell when war might come, or when an internal crisis might arise on the mainland. But one characteristic of that internal crisis, or hot war, is that its resolution will be partly political; and it will partly depend on the alternative visions of the future that the Chinese on the mainland have, including men who are now Chinese Communists. At the moment, Formosa has risen much since its low days of 1949 as a symbol on the mainland.

By and large, it still represents something from the past, however. If it is serious about its role on the mainland in the future, it must strike a posture which looks to the future and it must prove a rallying point for the non-Communist Chinese throughout this area, including Hong Kong.

Now all of this implies a diplomatic position for Formosa which guarantees U. S. support for it in its Free World status, which guarantees to Formosa a place in the U. N. Assembly at least. But I would add a word of caution. I think the United States must draw two lines. One, obviously, is that it must keep enough control on Formosa so that the issue of war or peace does not pass out of our hands into the hands of the Nationalists. But there is a political line we must draw, too. We must take the view that we will guarantee Formosa in Asia. We will do everything in our power to improve the administration on Formosa, and to assist them to gather military strength. We will use our good officers to help make them a rallying point for all the Chinese in Free Asia. We will permit them to use our influence and the symbol of their attachment to us to build up their prestige on the mainland. But the United States must and should draw back from any long-run commitment to install them as the rulers on the mainland in a time of internal crisis or hot war. The reason for that is that we do not know whether the kinds of men we may have to deal with in a crisis or hot war will have been attracted by the kind of program that the Formosans may develop over the future if they follow this line. We can *hope* that they become the great rallying point for the mainlanders as well as those outside the mainland, but we cannot guarantee this. We should keep our hands free to deal with any responsible group who might emerge on the mainland, who are prepared to meet American interests should there be an internal crisis or a hot war, while hoping that it is the Formosan leadership that captures the loyalties of these men.

Fifth, I shall now read you what we had to say on the question of U. N. membership for Peking:

“On the question of U. N. membership for, and U. S. recognition of, Peking, we arrived at the following view.

“The entrance of Peking into the U. N. is a limited political movement, the importance of which can easily be over-estimated. If it occurred at a moment of Free World weakness, or actual military or diplomatic defeat, it would indeed symbolize Communist China as Asia’s way of the future, and it would constitute an unacceptable as well as fruitless act of appeasement. If it can be brought about under the circumstances envisaged here, its adverse consequences could be minimized and the divisive issue would be removed from Free World politics.

“We therefore recommend in general: (1) The United States should accede neither to U. N. membership nor U. S. recognition until a positive Asian program, along the above lines, be launched. (2) The United States should not recognize Communist China unless and until the position of Formosa is developed along the lines indicated above, and its status so established in the Free World, perhaps under some new constitutional formula, that its continued membership in the U. N. Assembly can be assured. (3) The United States should be prepared to accede under pressure to Chinese Communist membership in the U. N. under the following conditions, none of which would apply before the U. N. Charter revision in 1955: *a.* That this step not be taken until Communist China has demonstrated its intention to qualify for U. N. membership, not only by

desisting from overt aggression in Korea, Indo-China, and elsewhere, but also by respecting scrupulously the truce terms in Korea and Indo-China; *b.* That Formosa retain a position in the U. N. Assembly. *c.* That under no circumstances should Communist China be made a member of the Security Council; *d.* That Japan and other states (and here I had in mind particularly Italy and possibly Western Germany) simultaneously enter the U. N."

Now what lies behind our conclusions in this appreciation?

There has been in the United States, and throughout the Free World, a concentration of attention on the question of China's recognition which has played wholly into the hands of the Communists. It has exactly fitted their purposes to have us belaboring our allies, and our allies feeling churlish about us, on the question of whether or not these jokers came into the U. N. If you talk, as I have recently, to Americans at all levels of sophistication, it is clear that they regard the fundamental issue of our Asian policy as whether or not these fellows come into the U. N. It is our view that this is but a detail in an Asian policy. I don't for a minute think we are going to get a nickel's worth of good out of having these fellows come into the U. N.; I don't think this is going to draw them away from Moscow; I don't despair of breaking the Sino-Soviet tie in time, but it will not be because they are in the U. N.

I consider that those who think that because the Chinese Communists are in the U. N. they will be good chaps are silly. On the other hand, if we continue to accept the concept of the U. N. as a place where the whole Free World meets the rest of the inhabitants of this planet, and if they meet the conditions of the Korean and Indo-China truces, there is in the long run a good case for letting them into the 'club.' They are no worse, and certainly no better, than certain other members of the 'club.'

The other advantage from our point of view is that it would remove from the Free World a highly divisive issue, and would get other people as well as ourselves to focus on the real issues of Asian policy, rather than on this phoney issue.

There is also a final point that I think is important. I think that it is very unlikely, if there are no more Korea-type wars out in Asia, that we *can* keep these fellows out of the U. N. As session after session goes by, our policy of postponing the issue will look less and less sensible. At some stage, they will be voted in. I think we should so behave that if they are voted in this will not appear either a major U. S. defeat or a U. S. act of appeasement. By the time that happens there should be an Asian policy in being, in which we are going about our business; we should have Formosa straightened out and its status in the Free World clarified; we should have met their threat in many particular places. Then we can say: "All right. If we are keeping this kind of a U. N., sure — you can come in. We don't expect anything good to come of it, and we're not out to treat you nicely in the hope that you will split with the Russians — but come on in."

Well, that is my view.

On the larger issue of breaking or diluting the Sino-Soviet tie, we hold the view that, given the outlook and ambitions of Peking's top leadership, nothing is to be gained and much could be lost by piecemeal efforts to wean Peking from Moscow by small kindly concessions. Short of major war, short of a direct attempt by Moscow to take over China, the Sino-Soviet tie is likely to break, in our judgment, only when experience demonstrates convincingly that there are no significant possibilities for Communist expansion in Asia, and that the Stalinist formula for economic growth now being applied to China is inappropriate to China and to Asia's economic problems as compared to the method used by the West. Under these circumstances of external frustration and demonstrated Free World superiority, we believe a crisis or

a significant change in internal policy and in the relationship between Moscow and Peking might develop. It is important, of course, that those who hold power or potential power in China know that they could withdraw from the Sino-Soviet alliance and enter into peaceful relations with the Free World without sacrificing China's national sovereignty; that, as with Tito, terms short of unconditional surrender are available.

It is our conviction, however, that this is well known in Peking. Its leadership is operating from aggressive hope, not fear. A break with Moscow, if it comes, will arise from a push imparted from frustration and failure of present plans, not from the weak pull of Free World appeasement.

The suggested lines of action, taken as a whole, are designed to maximize the possibility of this result. In the meanwhile, our task is to ease Peking's domestic problems and the frictions of the Sino-Soviet alliance to the minimum compatible with the unity of the Free World alliance. The greatest source of disunity is likely to center on Western trade with Communist China. It is our conclusion that Peking wishes to develop an extra margin of East-West trade, and that it is in our interest to frustrate this effort; that the possible margin of extra trade with Communist China is not likely to be on a scale nor of a composition which will significantly ease Japan's economic problems, or the Free World's economic problems in general. But it will be difficult — if not impossible — to prevent our allies from seeking a margin of East-West trade in the post-Geneva phase of policy.

Therefore, we urge that measures be explored for seeking within the Free World that acceleration in economic growth which would solve the trade problems of the industrialized countries without additional recourse to East-West trade and permit the development of an agreed program of minimum Western trading with Peking.

Here are, then, the answers that emerged in my mind after some fifteen months of intensive research and thought. I have had the benefit of discussion with a great many people in and out of the government, representing the whole spectrum of opinion, and I have tried to listen to all views with the humility appropriate to my own initial ignorance and the importance of the questions involved. In the end, I shaded my conclusions in no way to meet the believed views of others, and, in so far as I could, I called them as I saw them. I commend these views to you not as answers to the questions of what U. S. policy in Asia should be but, rather, as the key questions which we must answer if we are to have an Asian policy worthy of the name.

What are we to do about the techniques of 'soft' aggression? What are we to do about the Japanese economy, and the growth rate race between Communist China and the rest of Asia? How shall we seek to create a meaningful Free World, embracing the ex-colonial areas with their special problems, psychological heritage and their sensitivities? What shall we develop out of our base on Formosa, for it is a base absolutely dependent on us? How shall we deal, finally, with the pressure of our Allies to admit Communist China to the U. N. — an issue we have managed to postpone but in no way to settle? Finally, by what means and concepts should we act to reduce and ultimately eliminate the threat posed to our security by the Sino-Soviet alliance (if we eliminate U. S.-initiated war as an alternative)?

These are, I believe, the relevant questions, and it is with these questions, rather than with any dogmatic answers, that I leave this subject.

But I would add a final word, if I may. I emerged from these three years of work on Communism with a simple conviction, which, right or wrong, I am prepared to defend without reservation. It is this: it lies within the capabilities of the Free World —

its spiritual, political, material, and military capabilities — to defeat decisively the threat posed by the Communist conspiracy and to do so within this century, if not within a decade or so. There is no reason why the Free World, with its roots laid in principles going back thousands of years — principles tested from protracted human experience under all manner of circumstances — there is no reason why the Free World cannot make Communism a tragic aberration of this century, an aberration that has thrived on phases of weakness and self-doubt in the Free World in the face of the great problems of this century as they emerged. I do not underestimate the tactical capabilities of Communism nor its leadership. They can control great societies intimately, and mobilize their resources flexibility with a vigor which appears denied to the Free World. But this is largely an optical illusion, for the lesson of our experience with totalitarianism is that when the Free World faces the facts, clarifies its purposes, and generates the leadership, it is vastly more efficient and effective than totalitarianism. Totalitarianism looks good only in the face of weakness and confused Free World purposes. Our task, then, is to organize our resources — spiritual, material, political, and military — and to do so in good heart. For the simple truth is that the Free World appeals to the best and strongest in human beings, while Communism in practice — when it gains power — looks to the worst and weakest of human qualities. If we remain loyal to the best principles on which our society has been erected, we should have no fear of the outcome.

BIOGRAPHIC SKETCH

Professor Walt W. Rostow

Professor Rostow received his B. A. degree in 1936 and his Ph. D. degree in 1940, both from Yale University. He attended Oxford University from 1936-38, and received an honorary M. A. degree from that institution in 1946. He also received an honorary degree from Cambridge University in 1949.

In 1941, Professor Rostow joined the faculty of Columbia University for one year as an instructor. He was Harmsworth Professor of American History at Oxford University in 1946-47, and Pitt Professor at Cambridge University in 1949-50. Since 1950, he has been Associate Professor of Economic History at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where he is a member of the Center for International Studies.

Professor Rostow's principal fields of interest have been modern economic and general history, the American diplomatic revolution, and the British economy of the Nineteenth Century.

Dr. Rostow's most recent publications include: *The Dynamics of Soviet Policy* (in collaboration with Alfred Levin), 1953, and *The Prospects for Communist China* (with R. W. Hatch, F. A. Kierman, Jr., and Alexander Eckstein), 1954.