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THE CHALLENGE FACING THE UNITED STATES

A lecture delivered
at the Naval War College
on 25 August 1954 by
Professor W. W. Rostow

The challenge facing the United States is, in its essence, simple: can we prevent the enemy from fulfilling his intention? His intention is to drive the United States from power and influence in Eurasia; to isolate the United States on this Continent; and to deal with us in his own good time from the preponderant base he would then control.

Is the enemy making progress towards his goal? I believe he is making important progress.

What do we see as we look about the world?

The enemy has apparently developed a capability to threaten the United States with grievous damage; and he has put himself in a position to blackmail our virtually defenseless allies with atomic attack and national destruction.

One of our major allies — France — has accepted terms of limited defeat from Communist China, thus exposing for infiltration or worse a major strategic area embracing India, Burma, and Indonesia.

At just this moment the governments of those three vulnerable countries show signs of rejecting our world leadership and of seeking terms of accommodation with Communist China.

Japan, the Free World's major power base in Asia, is wracked by a chronic economic crisis, which rules out for the time being her assumption of appropriate responsibility — political and military — in Free Asia.

In the Middle East and in Africa conflicts long latent threaten to erupt, which the enemy has the intent and the capability to exploit.

In Europe, E.D.C., the mutual defense system we have long sought as an essential condition for European unity, seems on the verge of abandonment.

And finally, despite recent efforts, it is clear that the governments of Great Britain and the United States — inevitably the core of such Free World unity as there is — view this series of circumstances with different eyes and find the greatest difficulty in making common cause from day to day.

The unfavorable turn of events abroad in recent months has set in motion here at home an understandable but dangerous sense of frustration and hurt feelings — a tendency to blame our allies, who are indeed not blameless, and to look to more national solutions to our security problem. We are, as a nation, a bit disheartened with the policy of Free World coalition. This is reflected in American words and deeds abroad which push our allies further from us. And so, with a sharpened sense of vulnerability and fresh doubts of American purposes, they look weakly and somewhat pathetically to Moscow and Peking for amiable gestures which, costing nothing, are not denied them.

It is not too much to say that the designation of the United States as leader of a Free World may become an empty figure of speech if recent trends persist. We are threatened with an isolation brought about not by our own conscious decision but through an interacting process, involving in part the rejection of American leadership by our allies, in part the turning of the United States away from a coalition policy. Our feet are on the road — not far, but on the road — to becoming an awkward island off the mainland of Eurasia, thus fulfilling the basic intention of Moscow and Peking.

The enemy's challenge is not only real and immediate; it strikes at the heart of our national interest and our national security. Our national interest is to preserve and to develop in this republic a society based on the fundamental principles of individual freedom within the range permitted by government by consent. Our job is not merely to protect the handsome real estate which is our physical base; it is to preserve the still developing way of life which is the heart and meaning of America. Military means are, of course, absolutely essential to protecting our society; but if we are driven back to island status in a hostile totalitarian world much, if not all, of our national interest would quickly be lost — even without military defeat. Our kind of open society demands an environment of open societies about us, notably in a world of modern communications and modern weapons.

These are, then, my fundamental propositions: we are challenged by an intent to drive us from Eurasia; the enemy is making important progress in this direction; and this is a mortal challenge for the United States.

The general challenge we face has three specific dimensions: military, political, and economic. I shall deal briefly with each in turn.

The military challenge comes to this: can we prevent the enemy from expanding his area of power in an age when he, as well as ourselves, has atomic weapon delivery capabilities sufficient to damage or to destroy whole societies?

It should have been clear from the beginning in 1945 that atomic weapons would constitute a transient and limited contribution to the security of the United States. It should have been clear that if we developed such weapons our potential enemies could and would also develop them. Atomic weapons carried with them a threat for the United States new in our history, new at least since the war of 1812; namely, that our enemies could inflict directly upon us grievous damage. It should have been clear that future

major wars, if they came, would not be fought wholly on the territory of other peoples. In any case, it is now abundantly clear that the United States must live in a world of physical danger and insecurity, at least until effective disarmament is installed on a world basis.

This does not mean, of course, that our atomic weapons are unimportant to security; nor that the degree of our danger is wholly outside our control. There is much to be done.

The maintenance of atomic weapon delivery capabilities of the kind we now apparently have can deny to any enemy not bent on suicide his ability to use them against us. The maintenance of this capability is not a static thing. The weapons, the means of their delivery, the means of defense are under constant development and change.

Until the very day — until the very day — when effective international controls are installed we must maintain our ability to deliver overwhelming national disaster on our enemies and we must minimize his ability to damage us and our allies. This is an endless job in the world in which we live — a job not merely of allocating money and producing gadgets, but a job for creative scientists. And we must take great care that their contribution is woven positively into the tasks of national defense; for it is the essence of atomic weapons and their delivery that our capabilities are not a simple function of our steel capacity or of our industrial potential in general. They are and will remain a function of the best creative and original scientific achievement we can bring to bear on highly specialized tasks. We can maintain our capability for the long pull only if we recognize this fact and avoid technical complacency.

But a successful counter to our enemy's atomic weapon delivery capabilities is the beginning not the end of the military security task. Our enemy has noted that we have come to regard atomic weapons as our main strength. Just as the Russians worked

around, blunted, and defeated Hitler's main strength — his ability to penetrate Russia with armored divisions — so they are seeking to work around our atomic weapon delivery capability: by diplomacy, blackmail, subversion, and limited military operations which afford neither satisfactory atomic weapon targets nor a political setting in which we can find it possible to launch a direct attack upon the centers of Communist strength.

Here, then, is our major unsolved security problem: within the framework of our atomic weapon delivery and defense capabilities, how can we develop the forces to frustrate and ultimately to dissipate the threat presented by the Soviet and Chinese Communist power?

As I shall try to indicate later, this problem has absolutely essential political and economic components: but it has a technical military side which deserves the most creative thought we can bring to it. Here, as I see it, is the military position:

First, the enemy is extremely anxious to avoid the application to his structure of our weapon delivery capabilities. They carry to him a peculiar threat, not duplicated in the United States. These weapons threaten the continuity of his rule over his existing bases. With will and leadership our society could re-erect itself after atomic attack. The continuity of Communist rule in Russia and China is threatened by such attack. This is a potential source of strength to us in the test of will with which we live.

Second, while the United States wishes to avoid atomic attack, it must and should be prepared to face it rather than surrender. But our major allies in Europe and Asia, less protected than ourselves, will go to the greatest lengths to avoid such attack. It is a blunt truth, which we had better face quickly, that "massive retaliation" is incompatible with coalition stra-

tegy and perhaps incompatible with the maintenance of American power and influence in Eurasia, if — I repeat if — it is the sole foundation of our military policy.

Third, we must, therefore, find ways of coping with the enemy's challenge by means short of our ultimate weapons, if our aim is to maintain our coalition and to stay in Eurasia. We must avoid situations where the enemy's limited aggression in Eurasia can only be met with our ultimate weapons, and the citizens and governments of the Free World in Eurasia are openly or covertly blackmailed into accepting limited defeat, rather than permitting us to use those weapons.

Fourth, as I said a moment ago, in the last analysis we must be prepared to confront the enemy with superior relative delivery capabilities, as a deterrent, and to fight and win a war with the ultimate weapons — if necessary on a bilateral basis — should his irrational action detonate a war.

Let me state this as plainly as I can. It would be a disaster to the American interest if we now took the view that we must simply prepare for the ultimate war; step by step this position leads to our isolation on this continent; that is it leads to the achievement of the enemy's objective. It would equally be a disaster if we did not maintain the capability to fight such a war to victory; for we could be bluffed to defeat or actually defeated. We must bend our energies to coping with the enemy's military threat by means short of ultimate war, holding our coalition together, holding the balance of power in Eurasia, while still maintaining a framework of superiority in delivery capabilities in the ultimate weapons.

What, specifically, do I mean by military means short of our ultimate weapons? *First*, in Europe, sufficient tactical strength — ground, naval, and air — to rule out a Soviet Blitzkrieg to the

Channel. I cannot pretend to full knowledge of the capabilities position in Western Europe; and I make the following observations with some reserve. But I do profoundly believe that Western Europe and the United States have the manpower and resources to construct and maintain an effective screen against Soviet ground strength; for that strength in Central Europe has grave limitations as an offensive instrument. It is far from its production bases; its supplies must pass through territories which would demand in war enormous troop allocations to assure lines of supply; Eastern Germany is, from Moscow's perspective, a forward base subject to dangerous flanking operations from the Mediterranean. This is no news to you. I would simply emphasize that the popular conception of a Soviet ground horde poised in Central Europe, beyond our capabilities to match or to contain, is not accurate. The problem of protecting Western Europe on the ground is a problem of will and purpose and, to some extent, a problem of economic resources. It is not primarily a problem of overwhelming enemy capabilities.

Second, and probably more urgent, the Free World must develop in Asia notably, but elsewhere as well, new methods for coping with guerilla and other limited operations, where the enemy's troops are apparently not engaged. Such operations usually reflect — as in Malaya and Indo-China — a weak Free World political base. But we live in a revolutionary world, where rapidly changing societies may well be weak and vulnerable to the enemy's methods of aggression. It should be one of our basic purposes to prevent situations from degenerating to the point where guerilla and other limited operations can take effective hold. Nevertheless, we must be prepared to deal with them effectively, where they arise.

The challenge I put to you then — as professional military men — is the building of new techniques of limited warfare — including the limited use of atomic weapons — capable of containing the enemy's superior ground forces, just as our atomic weapon delivery capabilities contain his delivery capabilities; and of developing new techniques for dealing with limited forms of war-

fare, where these break out, as a result of the enemy's method of political subversion and guerilla operations, in weak areas of the Free World.

This policy of military frustration throws fresh burdens on to our political and economic policy. If I am right these burdens are inevitable; that is, we cannot sit back comfortably and rely on "massive retaliation", for in the present state of the world that means the acceptance of defeat, the acceptance of U. S. isolation. Just as I have a right to challenge you with fresh thought on forms of limited warfare, you have the right and duty to challenge the civilian to produce policies which will bind up the Free World effectively, maintain its political and economic health, and to avoid if at all possible the degenerate situations where military instruments must be evoked.

Nowhere is this view of the link between our political and security problems more clearly justified than in Asia. France and the Free World have suffered major defeat in Indo-China not merely because Soviet and Chinese arms crossed the Indo-China frontier. We have suffered defeat because France so conducted its political affairs in Indo-China that the peoples of that region would not rally to defend themselves against a Communist-dominated movement acting in the name of national independence. The Free World defeat in Indo-China was primarily a political defeat; and there will be no wisdom in our Asian policy unless we accept this fact. Nor can we blame this recent defeat wholly on the French. We backed with our money their Indo-China effort, knowing its weak political foundations, hoping for the best against our instinct and the facts. We had every reason to know from ample post-war experience that colonialism is an impossible base from which to fight Communism. We must not conceal our part in the common failure. If we acknowledge it maturely I am sure we can go on to build a policy in Asia which will serve our own interests and those of the Free World.

I believe we can erect a united Free World policy in Asia because I am convinced that what the Asians want and what we want in that region largely overlap. By and large they want the time and framework of security to make good their freshly won independence in terms of economic development and domestic reform. Rightly or wrongly they interpret recent American policy as a negative obsession with the Communist menace; as a threat to the peace; and as a dangerous distraction from their own urgent tasks. To work with them we do not need to accept their sometimes myopic assessment of the Communist menace. We do need to align our energies and an increased margin of resources with the challenging tasks of economic and social transformation in which they are engaged.

Beneath the surface of recent events I detect an increasing awareness in Southeast Asia of the potential military menace of Chinese Communism. It is clearly reflected, for example, at the recent Ceylon Conference, and in Chou En-lai's reception at Rangoon. India and Burma have already exhibited a remarkable sensitivity to Communism within their countries, as well as an ability to deal with it. And I believe that, given time, they will make a sound assessment of the international menace represented by Peking. But this they must come to themselves. In the meanwhile we have a very great stake indeed in the success of their economic and social policies. India, Burma and certain other nations of the Far East are seeking to transform their societies into modern, growing nations by democratic political techniques — with the methods of consent — maintaining the concept of the integrity and inviolability of the individual human being.

Up in the North the Chinese Communists have launched an economic plan which seeks to reproduce on the Asian scene the transformation painfully wrought in the Soviet Union in Stalin's First Five Year Plan. It is being conducted in China with a human ruthlessness which matches its model.

The political and military future of Asia is likely to be determined at least as much by the relative outcome of the Indian and Chinese economic efforts as it is by the strictly military events of the next decade.

This does not mean that we should abandon the attempt to bring into being a collective military alliance in Asia, or that we should abandon our bilateral efforts to strengthen the effective military strength of Free Asia. On the contrary we need such an alliance and such bilateral undertakings, and the commitment to cope with a commonly understood danger which underlie them. It does mean that we should not confuse such military arrangements with a total Asian policy; and that we should be prepared to enlarge our co-operation with the developing areas of Asia, whether or not they are prepared now to join in a required military alliance, or in bilateral military arrangements with us.

Into such a sustained constructive effort the United States should be prepared to throw increased resources, increased technical and scientific skill, and perhaps most important, increased human understanding and moral support.

I might add that only substantial economic growth in Free Asia as a whole will create an environment within which Japan can solve its most serious balance of payments difficulties and attain the self-supporting status its great talents and energies deserve, and the development of its political and military potential demands.

The problems we confront in Asia differ only in degree and urgency from those we confront in the rest of the world. In the Middle East, in Africa, and on our own doorstep in Latin America the horizon of ambition of man and women has lifted. They want and expect for themselves and their children not merely increased material welfare but increased personal and national dignity. There is no doubt at all that historians of the second half of the twentieth century will mark as its central feature

this massive human awakening to the best — and sometimes the worst values of Western civilization.

Anyone who has had even a slight connection with our postwar affairs knows that this revolution in human expectation raises difficult day-to-day problems for American policy making. Revolutions refuse to behave like well-run corporations. There has been and there will be plenty of difficulty in the process of transformation now proceeding all around us.

But we Americans should welcome this transformation and align our national policy with it. For the combination of human dignity, national independence, and material advance which men and women now seek with increased vigor are precisely the things for which the United States has long stood and for which our society at its best still stands.

To align ourselves with the revolutionary transformations now proceeding will take more than an economic policy, more than money and technical assistance. We must take an active part in engineering the transformation towards independence in those areas where colonialism still exists. There are no easy and automatic formulas here, at least none I am prepared to back. Independence can not come everywhere tomorrow; and the job of making healthy free societies does not end with a formal achievement of independence. But the active weight of the American influence must be steadily directed towards hastening the process of responsible independence by peaceful transitional measures.

We must be energetic before grave crises are upon us in these revolutionary areas of the world. That is the true lesson of Indo-China. There are ample warnings in Africa and elsewhere which we should now be heeding.

Basically, we face in the Free World two economic problems; and the central task of U. S. economic foreign policy is to so marry these two problems as to make them mutually supporting assets.

One problem is that of the industrialized areas in the Free World, the problem of Britain, Germany, and Japan. They require expanding markets for their manufactured exports and expanding sources of foodstuffs and raw materials coming from places in which they can sell their own goods.

The second problem is that of the under-developed areas of the world which seek to develop and modernize their economies so that they can attain self-sustaining growth.

The answer, broadly speaking, is obvious enough. The under-developed areas must grow fast enough so that the Free World offers adequate markets for the industrialized countries; the under-developed countries must include within their development programs not merely new industries but enlarged output of goods which are needed in Germany, Britain and Japan; and the industrialized countries must provide the sustained flow of technical assistance and capital equipment to bring about this balanced growth.

In making such a partnership for balanced growth in the Free World the United States has a decisive role to play. It must generate and export increasing amounts of capital, both to accelerate economic growth in general and to increase the output in the Free World of the foodstuffs and raw materials the Free World's industrial areas require. It must continue unrelentingly the battle to lower tariffs and make the American market a more vital element in the Free World economy.

Specifically we must now launch and sustain a major new investment program in the Free World, and I mean an investment and not a give-away program. A large part of the growth problem does not depend on capital at all. It depends on the will of men to undertake new productive tasks; on their energy; on their technical ability; and on their managerial ability. We can contribute something substantial in these directions through technical assistance; but the job must take place basically in the de-

veloping areas. Beyond this, a sustained flow of U. S. investment capital could help mightily, both in itself and as stimulus to further efforts within the developing economies.

In order to justify a program of this kind we must bear in mind that economic foreign policy is not an instrument designed merely or even primarily to advance the American economic interest; although a foreign investment program of this kind is much to the nation's economic advantage. Its primary purpose is to help the nations of the Free World achieve that material progress which is essential for the highest purposes we share; human dignity, national self-respect, and the maintenance of societies worth defending.

Given the nature of the enemy's methods of infiltration and subversion, and the relation between economic progress and political viability in many areas, there is a direct and vital link between our military problem in its narrow sense and a program for economic growth in the Free World.

But what is the situation in the camps of our enemies? Is there any assurance that if the United States should now strike out along those lines that Communist military efforts could be frustrated and Communism itself defected in a political and economic contest? I believe there are ample grounds for such assurance.

In the Soviet Union, Stalin's successors are caught up in his heritage of over-concentrated power, a distorted economy, and a smoldering empire. There is powerful resistance among the generation of bureaucrats raised up by Stalin to accepting another all-powerful dictator. But they confront the dilemma of limiting the powers of the secret police over themselves without loosening the hold of the Kremlin over the restless Russian peoples.

Grave problems beset Soviet agriculture whose solution in fact requires that the stultifying framework of political and social controls over the Russian peasant be altered. Although Stalin's successors have publically exposed the problem of agriculture they

have not been prepared to take the profound steps required for its solution.

These men have on their hands the massive, wasteful system of forced labor, a monument to the momentum and vested interests of a police state at its worst. They know its costs; but to dismantle it would disrupt the system of rule they still operate, and challenge its basic power, precepts and methods.

They confront Stalin's heritage in the satellites as well. Moscow took each logical step towards total power in Eastern Europe; but now it faces the costs and dangers of its position as a universally hated occupying power, a technique of imperial rule notably insubstantial for the long pull.

Finally Stalin's successors confront the Russian peoples themselves, anxious for peace, anxious for material advance, anxious to have the burden of chronic fear lifted from them. These popular ambitions the Kremlin recognizes, but can not satisfy without changes in domestic rule and foreign policy it is still unprepared to make.

Stalin's successors have clearly been aware of the cost and the dilemmas Stalin's heritage has imposed upon them. And the symptoms of this awareness have impressed many European observers of the Soviet scene, notably Sir Winston Churchill, who spoke of them recently on his trip to Washington.

It is certainly heartening to observe that history has not stopped in Russia; and to be able to demonstrate with precision that monolithic totalitarianism creates grave long-run problems and dilemmas by the very techniques which impart a surface of implacable strength in the short run. And I believe our national policy should seek to exploit and to consolidate any substantive possibilities for easing tensions which may result from internal changes in the Soviet Union.

There would be grave danger, however, in assuming that these recent symptoms of change in the Soviet Union automatically will yield a solution to world-wide tensions. There are no signs whatsoever that the changes wrought by Stalin's successors are as yet more than superficial.

They have not in fact decreased the allocation of resources to military purposes and heavy industry.

They have not in fact altered the police techniques of control over the Russian peoples.

They maintain an imprisoned agriculture, embracing fifty per cent of the population.

The modifications in the forced labor system have thus far been minor.

The realities of Moscow's total control by armed force over the satellites remains beneath the surface of new policy gestures.

Moscow and Peking talk much of increased East-West trade; but there is not the slightest evidence that they are prepared to restructure their economies in order to expand such trade significantly and without such drastic reorganization they simply do not have the capacity to trade on a substantially increased scale with the rest of the world.

Communist China is a somewhat different case; although the same broad conclusions hold. The men who now rule the China mainland are confident, ruthless, ambitious for indefinite expansion of power and prestige in Asia. They are in a mood nearer to Stalin of the 1930's than to the uneasy middle-aged bureaucrats who now rule in Moscow.

The system of centralized power that Peking has clamped on the Chinese people guarantees intimate control in the short run. But the Chinese Communists confront two great problems. First, it is doubtful that the Soviet technique of industrialization after 1929, based as it was on a rich surplus agriculture and an industrial heritage left from tsarist times, can produce the results the

Chinese Communists seek on the Asian scene. Communist techniques in Russia caused a 20% fall in agricultural output in the First Soviet Five Year Plan. This resulted in millions of deaths; but Russia's natural food surplus mitigated the crisis. Such an outcome in China would constitute a human disaster which would shake the control system erected by Peking and damage if not destroy the image of leadership the Chinese Communists seek to project out on Asia.

Whether or not a disaster of this magnitude comes about in China in the next decade it is clear that the regime has succeeded in alienating the 80% or so of the Chinese people who are peasants; and it has damaged the incentive to produce from the soil on which all else depends in China.

Second, the Chinese Communists are caught up inextricably in the fate of Asia. They are not isolated, like the Soviet Union after 1919. They must either make good their pretensions as the ideological model for Asia, and its major power, or they must fall.

Here is the Free World's challenge and opportunity in Asia. There is no reason why the united Free World can not produce more substantial material and human progress in Free Asia over the coming years than the Communists can in China. Such an outcome could be expected to have profound indirect consequences on the China mainland, on Sino-Soviet relations, and on the worldwide status of Communism as an ideology.

In short, I know of no responsible analysis of the situation within the Communist Bloc which does not lead to this conclusion: a vigorous and united Free World has the material and spiritual resources to frustrate Communism's menace and outstrip its pretensions as a system for solving the problems of organized society in this century.

My reflections, then, are basically optimistic. The areas for action are open to us on this side of the Iron and Bamboo Curtains; We have the resources, the talents, and the heritage

of ideas and idealism necessary for the task. I profoundly believe that the challenge facing the United States can be met with success.

The lines of action I propose carry, of course, a price tag — a substantial price tag: some several billions of dollars more each year spent and invested in the Free World and at home than we now budget for. Extra material resources alone emphatically cannot do the job; but they are probably necessary. Can we afford such substantial additional outlays? Of course we can. Our economy normally increases its capacity to produce by about \$14 billion each year. At the moment, we have an unused margin of capacity of about \$30 billion. If this regular margin plus this back-log is not enough — and it is almost certainly sufficient to meet the foreseeable challenge — we have larger margins of surplus consumption to fall back on than any society in the world. If we fail to meet the challenge, it will not be because we lacked the resources both to do the job and to maintain our high standard of welfare.

Do we have the will to do this job? Here each man must speak from his own sense of the nation and from private faith. I should merely say that there is nothing in our history out of the long or recent past to suggest that, when the facts are laid before the American people and vigorous leadership offered, we will fail to respond. I profoundly believe, once the trend of events is made clear, that it is not in the American temperament to accept the slow, only momentarily comfortable defeat the enemy plans for us. Our country was born as a symbol to the world of national independence and freedom ordered by individual consent. We are not yet ready to retire from a field where independence and freedom are the issues of combat.

Victory will not come without sustained effort. It will not arise from complacency, peevishness, or brooding over past errors. It will not come cheaply. It will not be hastened by attempts at shortcuts or by partisan slogans. It requires a united America maintaining a solid creative effort — military, political, and economic — for decades if necessary.

BIOGRAPHIC SKETCH

Professor W. W. Rostow

Professor Rostow received his A. B. 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 M. A. 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.

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.