

1973

The Diffusion of Power

Lawrence J. Korb

W. W. Rostow

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

Recommended Citation

Korb, Lawrence J. and Rostow, W. W. (1973) "The Diffusion of Power," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 26 : No. 3 , Article 24.
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol26/iss3/24>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu.

of life of traditional Vietnam and that proffered by Ho Chi Minh's version of Marxism-Leninism.

A serious weakness of *Fire in the Lake* is the lack of sufficient documentation as extensive use is made of the *Pentagon Papers* and other secondary sources. Some of the latter are well-known: works by Paul Mus, Jean Lacouture, and Bernard Fall, for example. Others are more questionable, such as the book by Kahin and Lewis or the "evidence" provided by a 1971 investigation by a Harvard University group. The work by Kahin and Lewis is cited as support for the claim that "by 1954 United States military aid covered eighty percent of French war expenditures." This is a belief dear to the hearts of revisionist historians, but it is inaccurate, as straightforward analysis of the aid figures for the early 1950's demonstrates.

There are other instances where documentation clearly is called for. One instance is the author's contention that the 1954 Geneva settlement was "more favorable to France than many French officials had expected." The easily obtainable sources which support this statement are not cited. No sources are cited to support such claims that there were 5 million refugees out of a Vietnamese population of 17 million or that "it was a white man's war being fought by blacks," a demonstrably false statement. These and other contentions by the author lack adequate documentation and therefore cast doubt on their validity and weaken the entire book.

Part Three of *Fire in the Lake* is unfortunate. After establishing a cogent premise and following with a generally well-written and perceptive narrative, Ms. FitzGerald deteriorates to the level of emotional political rhetoric. The chapter entitled "Nixon's War" describes a President continuing and even escalating destructive policies without any justification. The statement that "Nixon may well succeed in compelling

Vietnamese to kill each other for some time to come" is quite simply a distortion of the facts.

The author's conclusion is that the United States—in a misguided effort to halt the spread of monolithic communism—descended upon and desolated Vietnam and the Indochinese peninsula. The shades of truth in this argument must be discussed in the real political world. Ms. FitzGerald does not adequately deal with the domestic and international factors which influenced American policy in Southeast Asia.

U.S. efforts in Vietnam too often may have been tactically irrelevant and American policies repetitively inappropriate—that is, heedless of the effective political-military-cultural continuum. However, proper historical understanding of this period must develop with an objective view of the times. Ms. FitzGerald's generally excellent cultural and sociological work is limited by her closeness to the events.

BERNARD D. COLE
Lieutenant, U.S. Navy

Rostow, W.W. *The Diffusion of Power*.
New York: Macmillan, 1972. 739p.

It is difficult to characterize both the scope and the method of W.W. Rostow's latest and longest book. As indicated by the title, *The Diffusion of Power*, Rostow describes the transformation of the international system from a condition of bipolar dominance by the United States and the Soviet Union to a state in which there are multiple power centers. However, this book is more than just international in scope. The author also includes excellent analyses of such domestic issues as the race question. Moreover, Rostow analyzes the men, events, and decisions that shaped America's role in the world not only from the viewpoint of a research scholar, but also from the perspective of a policy adviser to three Presidents. Methodologically, *Diffusion of Power* is

a cross between such scholarly treatises as Hans Morgenthau's *Politics Among Nations* and memoirs such as Lyndon Johnson's *Vantage Point* or Maxwell Taylor's *Swords and Plowshares*.

As a piece of scholarship, Rostow's book is quite sound, but it offers no new insights. The rationale for the diffusion of power in the international system has been well chronicled, and the book adds very little to the earlier memoirs of Eisenhower, Johnson, or Taylor or to the personal histories of the Kennedy era by Schlesinger and Sorenson. Nevertheless, as a personal memoir the author's viewpoints are interesting and informative.

The most valuable parts of the book are the sections that deal with Rostow's justification for the American intervention in Vietnam. Much has been published by the so-called doves, but, except for Taylor's *Swords and Plowshares*, very little has been heard from the other side.

Rostow regards Southeast Asia as critical to the free world because of its size and location, i.e., it dominates the sea approaches of the Southwest Pacific and the eastern sector of the Indian Ocean and it is a critical buffer between China and the Indian Ocean. He feels that Vietnam is important to Southeast Asia because of its size and location and because of the domino theory. Moreover, Rostow is of the opinion that China was working with Hanoi (and Djakarta) to take over Southeast Asia.

One cannot but admire Rostow's intellectual honesty and consistency. Many of those who agreed with Rostow's position and gave similar advice to Kennedy and Johnson have become *post facto* doves when the situation in Vietnam turned sour.

On the other hand, one cannot but be dismayed by Rostow's own logic and his apparent unwillingness to confront reality. Even if one can leave aside such obvious considerations as "proportionality," America's moral leadership, and

the desires of the people of South Vietnam, Rostow's own acknowledgment of the fact of the "diffusion of power" and the split in the Communist movement makes it senseless to talk about losing Southeast Asia for the free world. Moreover, given the historical enmity between the Vietnamese and the Chinese, the buffer between China and India that Rostow seeks can be best brought about by a strong Vietnam united under the control of Hanoi. The fact of the matter is that the Communists are the only group presently capable of bringing about such unity.

Eric Goldman has written of *The Tragedy of Lyndon Johnson*, and John B. Henry and William Espinosa have described the "Tragedy of Dean Rusk." (*Foreign Policy*, Fall 1972), but it has been left to Rostow to write his own tragedy. For, in this *magnum opus*, Rostow's regret is not that we became involved but that the United States did not intervene earlier and more decisively.

LAWRENCE J. KORB
U.S. Coast Guard Academy

West, F.J., Jr. *The Village*. New York: Harper & Row, 1972. 288p.

March 1965 ushered in the intensive ground combat phase in Vietnam for the Americans, a war the Vietnamese had been enduring for a decade. The Americans pursued search-and-destroy operations with considerable success throughout the following year—if measured by the fact that South Vietnam was not sliced into pieces by North Vietnamese Army divisions combined with main force Viet Cong (VC) units. The war of attrition, from the viewpoint of the senior U.S. military headquarters in Saigon, appeared to be heading toward one of those ever elusive tunnel lights.

At the village and hamlet level, however, the war had a different cast. Vietnamese Government leaders down through the hamlet bureaucracy worked