

# The Choice Is Ours — Now

*Philip M. Klutznick*

I welcome an opportunity to briefly examine Walt Rostow's contention that we are at a watershed. I am inclined to accept the generic proposition, although it will become apparent that the premises with which we support the conclusion differ.

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Vietnam can well be the last great confrontation of the postwar era if we learn the lessons of Vietnam as well as others of recent years. Vietnam is providing an excellent modern example of the limitations of enormous military power. In another area, the Kennedy round, which was completed some months ago, there is also provided a classic example of the limitations of enormous economic power. If the people of the United States and especially its leadership can profit from the experiences of recent months on the military and economic fronts, then Mr. Rostow's thesis that we are at a watershed should prove valid. If we fail to understand or misinterpret what is happening, then it is possible that Mr. Washburn and the new generation are in for the kind of difficulties that could arise from a major decline in the affluence and influence of the United States. Naturally, every American might selfishly view such a prospect with great concern; I am sufficiently chauvinistic about our nation's potential for good that I view it with alarm for the world as a whole.

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Inherently and intrinsically, our people are well motivated. Their heritage is full of idealism and the desire to help others. Even if we have done badly at times, no other nation has tried to solve affirmatively and massively the problems of poverty and racism with the degree of earnestness that has characterized the effort of our country. No nation, at least until recent times, has given greater devotion to the idealism of a Woodrow Wilson in the international field or to the ambitions of a United Nations organization.

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Ambassador Klutznick, who served as a U.S. representative to the U.N. General Assembly and to the Economic and Social Council, was principal adviser to Adlai Stevenson in the area of economic and social affairs at the United Nations. He holds the position of Honorary International President and Chairman of the International Council of B'nai B'rith.

Among Dean Rusk's most cogent observations were those in his speeches on the United Nations when he emphasized American comfort with the Charter because it coincided to such a degree with our fundamental beliefs and with what should be our foreign policy.

If our nation, so oriented, loses status and declines to the level implied by Mr. Washburn, the loss will be universal, rather than national. It is this premise, I believe, which allows us to speak legitimately about the watershed to which Mr. Rostow referred in his speech.

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The lessons that can be learned from our postwar military experience apply with equal force and cogency to the economic and political fronts. We have finished going through an exhaustive experience in the so-called Kennedy round. Most informed observers have concluded that it was a successful engagement for the world as a whole and not without its positive aspects for the United States, although some political and business leaders could barely wait to seek Congressional protectionist action. In all this we have witnessed a nation possessed of unbelievable economic strength (alone engaged in roughly more than one-fourth of the world's international trade) and yet with such power still unable to dictate the terms under which it would trade. Our influence was certainly enormous in these negotiations, but not at all conclusive.



This result is attributable again in large part to the outgoing characteristics of our people — a willingness to live and to let live. We are not a people with a voracious appetite or killer instinct that will coldly countenance the economic destruction of others in order that we may advance a few additional per-

centage points. Great power in the hands of such a nation can be used in an enlightened fashion and toward a constructive end. It is doubtful whether there is in history another example of a country sitting alone on a pinnacle of strength, as we did at the end of World War II, and investing a substantial part of its resources to induce new competitive elements in international trade. Yet we did this through the Marshall Plan with, I for one choose to believe, open eyes.

We helped re-create a Western Europe with the foreknowledge that when we succeeded we would have presented the world with a powerful competitor to the United States. We encouraged the European Common Market in what I believe was enlightened self-interest even though it was quite evident that at some point it could become a troublesome and difficult adversary.

In short, we ourselves have helped to create the conditions that diminished the exclusivity of our own power and have compelled ourselves to become negotiators instead of dictators in the economic arena. Perhaps without too much elaboration, the same can be said of our commitment to the international community politically.

Certainly our sponsorship and devotion to the United Nations organization, to NATO, OECD, OAS, and other instruments of multi-national collaboration have placed us in a position where we are compelled to share the power which is ours, voluntarily or otherwise.

Consequently, it is my conclusion that Mr. Rostow, for reasons with which I may not be altogether in accord, is probably right — we are at another watershed in universal life. While we are faced with a period of increasing emphasis on nationalism and, regretfully, a growing reliance on military hardware, we are at the same time in the midst of a period where the powerful national economic strength and the utilization of the most sophisticated military hardware have shown their limitations. We are at the watershed in which the true nature of national power in today's world is becoming evident.

The United States, of course, can still go the wrong way. We can assume the posture that we have the strength and to the devil with the consequences; or we can be true to the intrinsic character of the American people and assume the posture that we have the strength both militarily and economically, but that this strength is to be used to promote universal harmony, unity, and peace, not war or economic destruction.

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