

To Move a Nation by Roger Hilsman. Book review by Abbot E. Smith

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TO MOVE A NATION: The Politics of Foreign Policy in the Administration of John F. Kennedy. By *Roger Hilsman*. (New York: Doubleday. 1967. 602 pp. \$6.95.)

In 1958 Roger Hilsman received a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation "to study the politics of policy-making in foreign affairs." Not long after commencing work on the project he was summoned to be Director of the Bureau of Intelligence and Research in the State Department, and then Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs. Sometime after the death of President Kennedy he left the government, went to a professorial post at Columbia, and recollected in tranquility the course of events he had experienced. This book is the result.

It is an excellent book, well organized, well written, well worth reading. There is some introductory discussion on general matters, and a closing section of meditation on the lessons to be learned. Between these are detailed, even anecdotal, accounts of the development of U.S. policy with respect to those areas the author knew best—Laos, Vietnam, and Communist China—together with somewhat less substantial sections on the Congo, Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Cuban missile crisis. Those who knew Hilsman will not be surprised that his own part—in these events looms pretty large in the telling, but they will be disarmed by his

disclaimer of omniscience and his generous tribute to the sincerity and high-mindedness of those—at least most of those—who opposed his views.

There is a great deal about the CIA—as an institution, as a collection of extraordinarily competent people, as a problem. It was a problem for all the reasons we have heard so often: its size and power, the compelling personalities of Allen Dulles and John McCone, its alleged policy-making proclivities, and so on. Hilsman treats all this fairly and judiciously, it seems to me. He emphatically denies that the Agency is or was a *Statt-im-Statt*, or an Invisible Government. He explains the need for an organization which can engage in covert action overseas and affirms the truth of Mr. Dulles's statement that all the actions of CIA were approved at a high political level in the government, outside of the CIA itself. Yet, says he, this still leaves room for lots of difficulty.

There is indeed room for difficulty. For the philosophical point of Hilsman's book is—not a new idea—that "very often policy is the sum of a congeries of separate or only vaguely related actions ... an uneasy, even internally inconsistent compromise among competing goals or an incompatible mixture of alternative means for achieving a single goal." Policy emerges out of argument and debate among men of various responsibilities and opinions, and as the sometimes inescapable consequence of actions and decisions, sometimes quite minor in themselves, which are taken as the course of events moves along. Throughout the book one sees the part that CIA actions overseas played in the development of policy. And CIA men sat in the councils of government at various levels, both at home and abroad. They were not faceless men without opinions; they had ideas of what ought to be done they knew, or thought they knew, what could be done. Their views carried weight.

Thus it is not true to say that CIA makes policy, and it is idle to say that it does not make policy. The subject is complicated; it cannot be dismissed in easy generalizations or offhand accusations. I do not know of a better basis for thinking about the matter than is supplied by the material in this book.

In its description of CIA's position and activities the book is accurate, as far as I can discover. There is one matter, however, on which the author erred, and it is an important matter. One day in August, 1963—it was a Saturday—the State Department sent a cable to Saigon which, in effect,

ordered a withdrawal of U.S. support from Ngo Dinh Diem. It was a memorable cable, drafted by George Ball, Averell Harriman, N-Michael Forrestal, and Hilsman. Clearance of this cable was a problem because so many important folk were out of Washington. According to Hilsman it was approved by General Carter for the CIA; and certainly Hilsman ought to know. But the fact is that it was not approved, or seen in advance, by anybody in CIA, and it created a sensation when it was read after being sent. Of course this was an act of high policy, and it was not for the CIA to say yea or nay.

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