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Studies in Statecraft

TO MOVE A NATION by Roger Hilsman. 602 pages. Doubleday. \$6.95.

Roger Hilsman, one of Merrill's Marauders in Burma in World War II and now, at 45, a professor of government at Columbia University, was one of John Kennedy's academic activists. From 1961 to 1963, he directed the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research; from early 1963 until soon after the assassination, he was Assistant Secretary for Far Eastern Affairs, then resigned under pressure because of his anti-Administration stand on Viet Nam. This book is Hilsman's contribution to the growing library of the Kennedy era. Cast in the form of studies in statecraft, it attempts—sometimes too ambitiously—to be at once an exploration of political process, a history and a memoir.

The author argues that more assertiveness and authority are needed in the State Department. Dean Rusk takes his lumps as a "superb counselor [who] could not bring himself to be an advocate." Hilsman's criticism is less than convincing, since it is based on his personal conviction that the Secretary of State should be a public fighter for policies of his own making, rather than merely the principal foreign policy adviser to the President—and claims that Kennedy wanted Rusk to function that way. In fact, most strong U.S. Presidents have always, and with good reason, preferred the Rusk to the Hilsman view of the Secretary's function.

Battle by Leak. Some of Hilsman's criticisms of the policymaking process are illuminating, such as his discussion of leaks, the "first and most blatant signs of battle" within the Government. He recounts how the crucial struggle over the 1957 Gaither Report on civil defense turned on whether to print 200 secret copies of the report or only two. Proponents of the report figured that if President Eisenhower rejected the findings, one of the 200 "secret" copies would surely be leaked to the press, carrying the battle to the public. They were correct: the larger printing was made, the President did not accept the report, and within days the Washington Post had published the gist of it.

Too often the author's theory is lost in jargon or banality: "In a political process, finally, the relative power of the different groups involved is as relevant to the final decision as the appeal of the goals they seek or the cogency and wisdom of their arguments." In history and memoir, which fortunately occupy the bulk of the book, Hilsman is pungent and direct in his appraisal of men and events. Defense Secretary McNamara

is described as "almost totally lacking in self-doubt," former CIA Director John McCone as a man with "a rough and ready sense of decency" that redeems his "streak of the alley fighter."

The Trollope Ploy. As "case studies," the author retells seven of Kennedy's major foreign policy crises, from the Cuban missile confrontation to Viet Nam. There are no monumental disclosures, but a great many small touches based on firsthand observation. Hilsman describes how Bobby Kennedy devised the "Trollope ploy" in the touchiest moments of the missile crisis. It was named after "the recurrent scene in Anthony Trollope's novels in which the girl interprets a squeeze of her hand as a proposal of marriage." When Moscow seemed to be stalling about pulling the missiles out of Cuba, the White House decided to force Khrushchev's hand by publicly accepting an offer of a settlement that he had made only tentatively and in secret. Next day he announced that his missiles would be removed.

In a long analysis of Viet Nam policy, Hilsman asserts that soon after Johnson became President, he foresaw L.B.J. escalating the war in a way he could not support. His dissent turns on whether guerrilla warfare should be treated "as fundamentally a political problem or fundamentally a war." To Hilsman, it is a political problem, which the U.S. buildup and the bombing of North and South have exacerbated rather than helped to solve. Though he admits that no one can be sure, he argues that Kennedy shared this view and would not have raised the military stakes as high as they are today.

To invoke Kennedy's hypothetical actions is a questionable tactic; there is also much evidence that, however reluctantly, he would have been forced by events into much the same decisions as Johnson. As to whether guerrilla war is "fundamentally" a political or military problem, the only answer is that it is both. The U.S. has never done so well on the political side as, ideally, it should have. But Hilsman seems to overestimate just how much could have been accomplished in the circumstances by political means alone, against a determined opponent who from the start used both military and political weapons in complete conjunction.