

Books of The Times

NEW YORK, N.Y.
TIMES

M- 767,259
S-1,473,981
JUN 9 1967

Government in Action

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SOCA. 01. 2 To Move a Nation

TO MOVE A NATION: *The Politics of Foreign Policy in the Administration of John F. Kennedy.* By Roger Hillsman. 602 pages. Doubleday. \$6.95.

Mr. Hillsman was, of course, himself a "pressure," for a point of view, for a way of doing things, and early in 1964 he resigned from government when it became apparent that the Johnson Administration was bent on a policy in Vietnam to which he was opposed and in the counseling on and implementation of which, he therefore felt, he would be of little use.

FIRST things first. Among the memoirs of those who served high up in the Kennedy Administration, Roger Hillsman's is one of the most absorbing and valuable we are likely to get. Moreover, as a study—in remarkable detail and depth, considering our closeness in time to the events described—of government operations, how the government works, what an administration is and what it can and cannot do, and, most specifically, how foreign policy is arrived at and implemented, "To Move a Nation" should become a standard work.



Roger Hillsman

Intelligent, lucid, blunt, vastly revealing—one might even say "juicy," except that the connotation of scandal is wrong—this is an endlessly fascinating book.

It is also, at this moment, a book of considerable political importance—not so much for Mr. Hillsman's particular policy opinions or for new bits of information that are of current controversial relevance, but for the rich, authoritative illumination it sheds on the functioning of government at a time when many people feel further and further removed from a coherent understanding of how American policy is really fashioned, its real aims and its actual effects.

Served in Many Posts

Mr. Hillsman, who is now professor of government at Columbia University, came to Washington as an expert in foreign affairs, intelligence (during World War II he served on several O.S.S. missions in the Far East) and counter-guerrilla strategy. From 1962 to 1963 he served, under Secretary of State Dean Rusk, as director of the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research; in 1963 President Kennedy appointed him to succeed Averell Harriman as Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs.

In both positions, Mr. Hillsman took part at the highest levels not only in policy planning but also in the coordination of policy implementation among the various government departments and agencies involved—most constantly, State, Defense, the Central Intelligence Agency and, of course, the White House. He also had to deal with—and was able to see—the pressures, sometimes decisive pressures, brought to bear on policy by Congress, by the permanent Federal bureaucracy, by the military, by interested individuals, factions, organizations, by the press and by a hundred other sources of varying power and influence, both inside

Detailed Case-Histories

"To Move a Nation" records, as detailed case-histories, the policy battles, successes, failures and stand-offs, of the Bay of Pigs, Laos, the Cuban missile crisis, war in the Congo, the United States and China, the crises with Indonesia and Malaysia, and Vietnam. Each of these accounts is fascinating and eye-opening (and, by turns, satisfying, horrifying, ludicrous, etc.) in itself; but in each the emphasis is on the complex struggle in Washington.

The struggle in Washington is conducted on many levels, always in the context of on-going events. "The making of policy is politics," Mr. Hillsman writes, and is achieved by maneuver, persuasion and compromise. The American Government, he adds, is not one of "separate powers," as we are usually taught, but more accurately, one of "separate institutions sharing powers." Thus, he writes, "Policy faces inward as much as outward, seeking to reconcile conflicting goals, to adjust aspirations to available means and to accommodate the different advocates of these competing goals and aspirations to one another."

But the process is not abstract, not impersonal; it is carried on by people, and he notes that "the interaction of personality is often the decisive factor in shaping decisions." The book contains incident after incident proving this point, as well as stubbornly straightforward portraits of the particular men, as Mr. Hillsman sees them, who shaped the important foreign policy decisions of the Kennedy Administration. Nor, he reminds us, is politics always a contest for power; it is often, perhaps just as often, a diffusion or avoidance of responsibility, "a scramble to get off target zero."

There are hints of absurdity in all this, and absurd situations, many of them described here, occasionally result—as in the Congo crisis, which Mr. Hillsman likens to the game of croquet in "Alice in Wonderland"; or in Vietnam, where one local general exclaimed to an American friend: "Ah, les statistiques! Your Secretary of Defense loves statistics. We Vietnamese can give him all he wants. If you want them to go up, they will go up. If you want them to go down, they will go down."

Yet intelligence, integrity, sensitivity, goodwill and conviction also count for something, as this book argues and illustrates; and the cynic's view of politics, or the world, as a particularly messy playpen, and hopelessly nothing more than that, is specifically rejected. Mr. Hillsman closes his book with recommendations for better, and more informed, policy planning, and with an unsurprising but acute appraisal of President Kennedy's