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Roger Hilsman has been a professor of Government and International Politics at Columbia University since 1964 but he is most famous for his role in the administration of John F. Kennedy. Hilsman served as Kennedy's Assistant Secretary of State for Intelligence and Research and Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs. He has a wealth of first hand experience on world issues and played a central role in the Cuban Missile Crisis. He subsequently wrote a book on the subject in 1996. It was perhaps because of his experience during the Cuban Missile Crisis that Hilsman resolved to write this current book.

The world came close to nuclear war in 1962 and the basic theme of Hilsman's new work is that nuclear war is inevitable unless the world radically alters the way it settles disputes and uses war as an instrument of policy. The book is well written and most of it, 20 chapters, is devoted to historical interpretations of the evolution of nuclear military doctrine. In the final five chapters he outlines his ideas on how to permanently circumvent the threat of nuclear war in the future.

In the historical section Hilsman looks at the various methods used in the past and currently to prevent nuclear war and finds them all wanting in deterrent value. He believes that the traditional military approach, summed up in the phrase, "If you would maintain peace, prepare for war," actually heightens the threat. The Strategic Defense Initiative, "Star Wars," first proposed by Ronald Reagan, presents a similar problem. A third preventive measure, the doctrine of "no first use," originally created by Robert McNamara, McGeorge Bundy and others in 1982, which proposed that the United States should deny itself the option of using nuclear weapons first, is also bankrupt. Finally, he sees arms control as an outright failure. To replace these ad hoc measures, Hilsman has searched for a medium proven through history that could effectively quell future disputes. As he concludes, "In the history of humankind the only reliable instrument for reducing the incidence of war in any particular region has been government." (p. xi) Thus, his proposal for ending the threat of nuclear war centers squarely on the establishment of a one-world government.

Hilsman is prescient enough to recognize the great obstacles to achieving such a grandiose objective and therefore holds its accomplishment as a long-term, utopian goal. Even international organizations designed to prevent wars, such as the League of Nations and United Nations, have failed miserably. Only the European Community has been successful in limiting war within its ranks. Hilsman relents in the face of this stark reality and seeks interim and transitional solutions involving medium-term measures and short-term stopgaps.

The best part of Hilsman's book is the historical section. It provides a wonderful overview of nuclear military strategy since 1945. However, his proposal section lacks finish, too much is taken for granted and at times it is difficult to follow his logic. For instance, his stopgap answer is deterrence, the very solution he cited as unsound. When

dealing with rogue nations building nuclear weapons he merely states that the United States should “aggressively lead the international community in monitoring potential violaters.” (p. 236) If negotiation fails force will be required. He then advocates the US calling an international conference to “reach and publicize and agreement that the great powers will jointly invade and destroy any state that attacks another state with nuclear, biological or chemical weapons or that supports a terrorist organization that does so.” (p. 283)

Hilsman envisions the United States having two types of forces, a nuclear force for deterrence and what he loosely terms an “antiescalation force” armed with conventional weapons to intervene against rogue states building nuclear weapons. The question is, how is this different from what the US has now? He wants to scale down the American military past Bill Clinton’s reductions and even disband NATO. In the process, he comes to arbitrary force levels which really have no basis in reality but are designed to send signals to other powers that the US is less belligerent. In fact, it seems to be all about money for Hilsman, who repeatedly states that although the purpose of reducing the military is not to save money, tens of billions would be saved nonetheless. (pp. 287, 288, 303)

Perhaps the strangest thing Hilsman suggests is that there should be the “establishment of an international force equipped with, say, fifty nuclear weapons to be used only by order of the U.N. Security Council against any country found to be violating the treaty by building nuclear weapons.” (p. 291) He seems to think such a force could somehow be portrayed as a non-first strike world asset and expects far too much from it. Not only must it have a deterrent effect equal to Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD), i.e. sheer terror factor, but it must be able to send signals, shaped as incentives to negotiate and “build toward some sort of world community.” (p. 293) Hilsman calls it his deterrent/incentive strategy.

Although Hilsman makes some precise deductions, such as the long-term instability factor of nationalism, his proposal completely misjudges the immense difficulties of coordinating world activities to suppress nuclear weapons and war. The only reason that collective wars were fought in the past to halt aggression, i.e. Korea and the Gulf, was that the United States led the way. Hilsman seems to think that a weakened United States could possess greater influence in combating rogue states and fighting “antiescalation wars” if it reduced its military forces. Nothing could be farther from the truth.

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