

Book Reviews

On Thernuclear War. Herman Kahn. Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J., 1960. xx + 651 pp. \$10.

According to Herman Kahn, if deterrence is to be used to advance or maintain our position in a world of power politics, we must have the will to use the weapons if deterrence fails—that is, we must accept the position that thernuclear war would not be annihilating, at least not over the next decade or so, and that, with careful planning, recovery from a nuclear attack is possible in a few years. Kahn argues that we must have the weapons needed to meet a variety of possible situations, ranging through bluffs, blackmail, and accidents to irrational behavior. That is, we must be able to (i) deter an attack by creating the fear of retaliation from a damaged Strategic Air Command or the fear of a preemptive strike by SAC following a tactical warning; (ii) deter provocative action by creating the fear of a premeditated first strike at the nation offering provocation; and (iii) deter provocative action by having the capability for counteraction which is expected to be so effective that the net effect of the “aggressor’s” action would be a loss in his position. Necessary components of this posture include civil defense, a capability for limited war, a preattack mobilization base, and, hopefully, arms control.

The bulk of the book is devoted to by far the most detailed and lucid analysis yet presented of the kinds of weapons systems, mobilization bases, and postattack planning and resources required to meet situations which might involve military power. Even so, as Kahn is at pains to demonstrate, much more study is necessary before an evaluation can be made of the full implications of his position on such problems as the long-term biogenetic effects of radiation resulting from large attacks, the feasibility of blackmail techniques, the flexibility of the war plans in retaliation missions, and command and con-

trol. But the fundamental utility of his analysis rests on whether his thesis is valid: Kahn argues that thernuclear war will not be annihilating (of social systems, if not all men) and, therefore, that if we are faced with “intolerable” or “outrageous” provocations we ought to be prepared to accept the social and material costs of recovering from a thernuclear war rather than the costs of avoiding that war.

“Recovery” to near-normal prewar levels (as contrasted to politically, socially, and technologically primitive ways of life) depends crucially on the effective fulfillment of “seven optimistic assumptions: 1) favorable political environment, 2) immediate survival and patch-up, 3) maintenance of economic momentum, 4) specific bottlenecks alleviated, 5) ‘bourgeois’ virtues survive, 6) workable post-war standards adopted, and 7) neglected effects unimportant.” However, in estimating the validity of these assumptions, Kahn does not apply the same careful analysis he used on hardware to the human condition in the postattack period. The considerable data available from history and the laboratory about the behavior of groups, individuals, and leaders under extreme threat, in the face of sudden disaster, or in ambiguous situations is ignored. Also ignored are the profound problems of establishing adequate, integrated leadership and command and control in a postattack society, for such a society may well be bereft of many layers of responsible, trained, civilian leaders. Nor does he discuss adequately the enormous problems of managing nationwide evacuations (historical examples are not analogous here), operating large fallout shelters during many days of occupancy, and training shelter-management cadres as well as insuring their presence in the shelters.

As a result of these oversights Kahn’s statements about the behavior, values, and aspirations which could be expected to prevail under these disaster conditions are inadequate, incorrect, and glib to the extent that doubt is cast on

the plausibility of his optimistic assumptions. It is also well worth noting that there is nothing in his analysis which gives reason to believe that recovery could be accomplished under democratic forms of government.

As to peacetime planning for post-attack recovery, much could be done to accomplish the things necessary for recovery if sufficient research, planning, and implementation has been carried out, but it is very likely that this could be accomplished *only* through imposed or voluntarily accepted approximations of a garrison state. It seems clear, on the basis of several studies, that the required degree of peacetime integration and control of economic, political, institutional, and personal activities would very likely conflict with traditional concepts of the private and public rights and privileges of Americans.

Thus, Kahn’s book is profoundly useful in four ways: (i) It should force any one who proposes to say anything about deterrence to stop talking vagaries and shibboleths. (ii) It should force those espousing Kahn-type weapons systems to recognize the crucial need for the same detailed study and analysis of people and leadership under ambiguous threat as that already given to thernuclear hardware and tactics. (iii) Since Kahn’s military approach is idealistic (it demands unstinting national commitment to logical behavior under all conditions), the book should make acceptable the study of other idealistic political or social approaches to the crisis. (iv) Since democratic values might well be lost in preparing for or in recovery from nuclear attack (and since the chances of their eventual revival are moot), the book should force a searching inquiry into the choice of means in preserving ends in a world of crises and political change everywhere.

DONALD N. MICHAEL
Brookings Institution,
Washington, D.C.

Talent and Education. E. Paul Torrance. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1960. x + 210 pp. \$4.50.

One of the 16 authors quotes Norbert Wiener’s statement: “Let those who choose to carve a human soul . . . be sure that they have a worthy image after which to carve it, and let them know that power of molding an emerg-