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## Why Do We Bomb the Way We Do?

The "regular bombing" of North Vietnam stopped in 1968, leaving many Americans with the impression that any bombing since has been slight and intermittent. Behind the shield of this impression the administration has bombed at discretion without the hindrance of public furor. It is done so, of course, in the name of "protective reaction," a concept which originally covered strikes against anti-aircraft defenses but which has since been expanded to cover strikes against anything: the latest strikes are "in reaction to enemy activity which imperils the diminishing United States forces" in South Vietnam. More than 100 "protective reaction" raids have been flown this year. Since May 1970 there have been eight "limited duration air strikes" involving, like the latest, hundreds of planes raiding over one or two days, or more. Ignoring all it has taught us about random quality of mass bombing, the Pentagon insists that only military targets are being hit. Hanoi reports a bombed hospital.

The rationale for the recent strikes—that American lives are saved when supplies are hit in North Vietnam before being moved down the Ho Chi Minh Trail—is no longer persuasive, if it ever was. As Mr. Nixon has proven, the way to save American lives is to remove Americans from combat—better yet, from Vietnam. It is his withdrawal program and new "rules of engagement" (don't fight on the ground) which have lowered casualty rates, not the bombing.

To support this statement, we offer you Air Force Secretary Seamans. He recently conceded that bombing had reduced the supplies reaching Communists in South Vietnam and Cambodia only to the level of 1967. And in 1967, despite an Indochina-wide bombing total of almost a million tons (the 1971 figure is about the same), enough supplies reached Communist forces to cause the United States to escalate the war on a massive scale. In November and December, the dry season, we have bombed the trail at a rate of 5,000 sorties a month. Yet, as a "military source" told UPI: "The North Vietnamese have between 25,000 and 30,000 miles of roads along the Ho Chi Minh Trail. We crater a road, they switch traffic to a second road and have the first one repaired in half a day. We can't win."

Defense Secretary Laird, on Monday, justified the new attacks by saying Hanoi had broken "the so-called understanding" by which Washington stopped regular bombing in 1968. Mr. Laird cited five "acts" or "violations" of it. (1) Saigon was shelled on Dec. 19 by two rockets, with no reported casualties. (2) North Vietnam has built an "infiltration road" through the DMZ; it was built a year

ago. (3) "There have been no substantive negotiations as promised" in Paris; whose fault is that? (4) Hanoi has fired on "unarmed reconnaissance planes"; and why not, when we attack radar sites as soon as we pick up their signals? (5) North Vietnam attacked more American planes in December than in any month in three years; this is like saying "the dirty Reds, they're shooting back." In all, Mr. Laird's statement was threadbare and embarrassing, all the more so in contrast with Secretary of State Rogers' declaration less than a week before (a portion of which is excerpted for the Record elsewhere in this page today) that Communist offensives in Laos and Cambodia are "a clear indication of the failure of their military activity in South Vietnam." Given this "failure," why do we bomb the way we do?

Is there any reason—other than a big power's mindless muscle flexing—for the United States to continue to drop more tons of destruction a year in Southeast Asia than it dropped in the whole Korean War, and almost half as much as it dropped in the whole Second World War? Many Americans, we believe, are sickened that their government should continue to bomb a country with which we are not formally at war, especially when the strictly military results are, by military analysis, so dubious. There is no reason to think Hanoi is bluffing when it says that further raids will only "increase the numbers and prolong the imprisonment" of American POWs—at least five more planes have been lost in recent days. There is, as well, the jeopardy to the prospects of American diplomacy in Moscow and Peking.

We can understand the requirement, psychological if not military, for some use and threat of air power against North Vietnam as part of a program of phased withdrawal of ground troops from the South. We can understand, too, the difficulty of abruptly subtracting the air power which we ourselves allowed to become an integral element in the Indochina equation in the minds of both Saigon and Hanoi. But the continuing huge dimensions of American bombing—and in particular the massive "limited duration air strikes" against North Vietnam when suddenly targets materialize for every airplane in the theater—are another matter. To call this "protective reaction" is to continue to engage in a familiar and thoroughly discredited shell game. For these raids convey a sense of unrestrained power and a readiness to use it which is quite out of keeping with what the President claims as his objective and with what we believe should now be the guiding American aim: to write "mission accomplished" on the American role in the war.