

Q. & A. on the Bombing

A Distillation of Official Views On the Main Concerns of Critics

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WASHINGTON, April 19—Of all the many questions raised here in recent days about the current United States role in the Vietnam war, perhaps a dozen best summarize the major concerns of members of Congress and other critics. Below are what appear to be the Government's composite replies, drawn not from any single official source but rather from the general testimony of Secretary of State William P. Rogers and Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird and from the private comments of other top Administration officials.

Q. What is the jurisdiction for any continuing American involvement in the Indochina war?

A. To redeem an already costly American commitment to protect South Vietnam against military conquest; to protect the program of gradual American withdrawal so that the Saigon Government can survive under a political system of the South Vietnamese people's choosing; to force the return of American prisoners of war; through such a generally "honorable" end of the involvement to demonstrate the fidelity of the United States' commitments to other allies and dependent nations.

Q. What is the purpose of intensified American bombing in North and South Vietnam?

A. To protect the remaining American troops in the war zone; to protect the program of troop withdrawals; to help the South Vietnamese resist a major frontal attack; to render on slaughters in the months to come more difficult or even impossible; to retaliate for violation of a 1968 "misunderstanding" forbidding troops to cross the demilitarized zone along the border between North and South Vietnam; to demonstrate the continuing American power that can be applied in the war; to neutralize some of the advanced equipment supplied to Hanoi by Moscow.

Q. Why bomb Hanoi and Haiphong at this time, and why will the bombing of North Vietnam be more effective now than it was between 1965 and 1968?

A. Because the current high-

ly mechanized North Vietnamese attack differs from past enemy offensives; because the tanks, personnel carriers, mobile missiles and other weapons and vehicles are more dependent on fuel and replacements that could be moved quite quickly to the front; because raids against the main supply depots in the major cities inflict the greatest damage on those essential items.

Q. Why was Congress not consulted on the escalation?

A. Because the President alone determines tactics, and he needs surprise when he strikes.

Q. Why not protect American troops by withdrawing them immediately?

A. Because air support and other logistic and advisory services are still needed by the South Vietnamese; because some combat troops are still needed to protect the American bases; because the presence of some troops will be used to negotiate the release of American prisoners of war.

Q. If Vietnamization is working why do the South Vietnamese need such extensive American air power while the North Vietnamese fight without anything comparable?

A. The first objective of Vietnamization was to relieve Americans of the high casualties resulting from ground combat operations. Now the South Vietnamese are beginning to assume logistic and tactical air power, but this gives them capacity to fight only in their part of Vietnam and not reach up to the supply routes and centers in the North. On the other hand, the Russians have equipped the North Vietnamese for offensive operations far from home base.

Q. Does Vietnamization provide for the end of American strategic and tactical air strikes?

A. The Saigon Government is to assume tactical air responsibilities on an undisclosed schedule, but American strikes against enemy troop concentrations and supplies will be conducted whenever Saigon's forces appear to need help. For the time being nothing is ruled out except the increase in American troop strength and

the use of nuclear weapons.

Q. What would happen if the United States stood aside and let North and South Vietnam fight it out?

A. Current estimates are that the South Vietnamese forces would suffer serious reverses, perhaps even a rout, particularly in the region around Saigon and in the Central Highlands. American air power has been less directly necessary—or useful—in defending the northern sectors of South Vietnam.

Q. Do the diminished number of American troops really need protection?

A. It is thought that major North Vietnamese breakthroughs would cause American bases to be overrun, but in any case the protection of American troops is the only constitutional authority available to the President for the military operations he is conducting.

Q. Why is the Administration taxing the Soviet Union with responsibility for Hanoi's offensive?

A. Because Moscow should bear some responsibility for offensives made possible by its arms even if it does not plan them; because a policy and counsel of Soviet restraint may still be necessary to diminish the fighting and negotiate the end of the war; because the United States and the Soviet Union cannot expect to profit from détente and agreements in some areas while they induce military challenge to each other and their allies elsewhere.

Q. Is not American help to South Vietnam vastly greater than Soviet help to North Vietnam?

A. Yes, but the American help is for the purpose of defending South Vietnam while Soviet help is for the purpose of invasion and conquest.

Q. How serious are the American threats of mining the Haiphong harbor or otherwise blockading North Vietnam against Soviet and other foreign supply ships?

A. Those measures are recognized as extreme steps that would have only long-range effect on the battle in South Vietnam while immediately confronting the Russians and other Naval suppliers with a direct American challenge. But they have not been ruled out and will not be ruled out until there is evidence of greater "restraint" in Hanoi.