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STUDY SHOWS U.S. PRESSES AIR WAR

Cornell Team Sees Contrast With Cut in Ground Action

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WASHINGTON, Nov. 7 — A comprehensive study of the air war in Indochina by a Cornell University group concludes that while the Nixon Administration drastically curtailed American ground combat, it is maintaining a high level of bombing and, in Cambodia and Laos, has in fact intensified the air war.

The study acknowledges that the Administration has roughly cut in half the intensity of the air war in Indochina from the peak years of 1968 and 1969, when the United States was waging the most intensive bombing campaign in history.

But the study says the average tonnage being dropped is at about 70,000 tons a month, almost the same level as in 1967, when the American public was more aware of a major war in Indochina because of the direct involvement of American ground combat troops.

6 Millions Dropped

By the end of 1971, the United States will have dropped on an area about the size of Texas six million tons of bombs and other aerial munitions, three times the total tonnage used in World War II. The Nixon Administration, in its three years in office, will have loosed as much as and possibly more explosive power than did the Johnson Administration — about three million tons, the study says.

The reduction of area-obliviation raids by B-52 bombers has not been nearly as marked as the cut in strikes by smaller fighter-bombers. These area-obliviation raids are still estimated to run 30,000 tons a month, the study says, compared with 40,000 tons monthly during the 1968-69 peak.

The Administration plans to continue the air war through 1972 and beyond at a cost that could range from \$1.2-billion to \$4-billion a year, depending upon the amount of force required by policy needs, the study states. Citing "sources close to the Pentagon," the study says plans appear to call for keeping 50 B-52's in Thailand and 300 fighter-bombers there and on carriers offshore.

Study Took 5 Months

The five-month study, begun in May, was sponsored by Cornell's Center for International Studies. The preliminary version of the report runs about 200 pages. It has extensive footnotes and is illustrated with graphs. The group hopes to publish a fuller report by the end of the year.

The team of 19 professors and students involved, headed by Prof. Raphael Littauer, a 45-year-old nuclear physicist, drew its findings from source materials that included official

Pentagon statistics and reports, newspaper articles, interviews with approximately 80 defense and foreign-policy specialists and former military and civilian officials, as well as the once top-secret history of the air war contained in the Pentagon papers.

In a telephone interview, Professor Littauer said the study team had access to the volumes of the Pentagon papers dealing with the air war from the time articles and excerpts were published in The New York Times last summer to the publication at the end of September of the declassified version by the Government Printing Office.

He said the study was initiated from antiwar sentiments, but that the team had attempted to be as fair and scholarly as possible. "We decided to let the chips fall where they may," he said.

Escalation Charged

The report states that bombing of the Ho Chi Minh Trail supply roads through southern Laos, a relatively unpopulated area, has been increased steadily by the Nixon Administration and is now running at 400,000 tons of explosives a year.

Bombing in Cambodia, with serious civilian casualties resulting, the report asserted on the basis of Congressional testimony, has also climbed steadily since the American incursion in the spring of 1970 and is now running at 90,000 tons a year. This figure approaches the 124,000 tons dropped on North Vietnam in 1966 when an intensive air war was under way there.

In South Vietnam, nearly 300,000 tons of air explosives a year are still being dropped, now mainly by the South Vietnamese air force, which has been greatly expanded. This is equal to the level of 1966.

The report argued that the continued heavy use of air power was not stopping enemy advances in Indochina and that the destruction it was causing actually made the achievement of peace more difficult by disrupting the societies the United States says it is attempting to stabilize.

Despite a scorched-earth bombing campaign against enemy-held towns and villages in northern Laos and the Plain des Jarres, possibly a third of the estimated total of 2.5 million Laotians have become refugees and the enemy forces "now control a greater fraction of Laos than ever before," the study said.