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President ignores a report showing bombing ineffective

NEW ORLEANS STATES-ITEM

WASHINGTON — A secret Vietnam study, which President Nixon ordered before he was sworn in, warned that the massive bombing of North Vietnam had failed to hamper the enemy war effort.

As President-elect, he had sought hard answers about the war he had promised to end. His foreign policy czar, Henry Kissinger, fired off a series of questions to the key government agencies. The answers caused

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him to remark afterward: "We found out how ignorant we were."

Kissinger compiled the answers in a bulky National Security Study Memorandum, which became known inside the White House as NSSM-1. A bootleg copy found its way to Sen. Mike Gravel, D-Alaska, who has been analyzing it for months. Significantly, he is the same senator who dared to spread the secret Pentagon Papers on the Senate record.

We have also obtained a copy of NSSM-1, which gives a devastating appraisal of the ineffectiveness of ex-President Lyndon Johnson's bombing campaign.

Four years of bombing, reported the Central Intelligence Agency, "did not seriously affect the flow of men and supplies to Communist forces in Laos and South Vietnam. Nor did it significantly erode North Vietnam's military defense capability or Hanoi's determination to persist in the war."

Agreeing, the State Department noted: "There is little reason to believe that new bombing will accomplish what previous bombings failed to do, unless it is conducted with much greater intensity and readiness to defy criticism or risk of escalation."

B-52 kill rate

Even the Defense Department acknowledged that "the bombing did not significantly raise the cost of the war" to North Vietnam.

The Pentagon estimated that "approximately 52,000 civilians were killed in NVN by U.S. air strikes." The Joint Chiefs and the Defense Secretariat disagreed, however,

over how much explosives it took to kill an enemy.

The Joint Chiefs figured one giant B52, which could drop 30 tons of high explosives, wiped out an average of 2.5 North Vietnamese on each mission. By this reckoning, it took 12 tons of high explosives to kill a single soldier or civilian.

But the statisticians in the defense secretary's office contended that a B 52, on the average, eliminated only 0.43 persons per sortie. If this estimate is correct, 45 tons of explosives were required to dispose of an enemy.

'Many hardships'

In addition to the casualties, the Pentagon noted: "The bombing undoubtedly had adverse effects on the people of NVN. Individual citizens suffered many hardships . . . Food was rationed and consumer goods were scarce; and air raid warnings disrupted the lives of the populace and forced many to leave their homes . . ."

"Still, there is no evidence to suggest that these hardships reduced to a critical level NVN's willingness or resolve to continue the conflict. On the contrary, the bombing actually may have hardened the attitude of the people and rallied them behind the government's programs."

Concurred the CIA: "There were some indications in late 1967 and in 1968 that morale was wavering, but not to a degree that influenced the regime's policies on the war. The regime was quite successful, however, in using the bombing threat as an instrument to mobilize people behind the Communist war effort."

"There is substantial evidence, for instance, that the general population found the hardships of the war more tolerable when it faced daily dangers from the bombing. . ."

Bombing failed

All the secret estimates agreed that Russia and China were keeping North Vietnam in the war.

"Whereas the bombing destroyed capital stock, military facilities and current production in North Vietnam worth nearly \$500 million," noted the State Department, "Soviet and Chinese aid during this period was nearly \$2.9 billion, nearly six times as much."

Following two paragraphs included
in SFChronicle version of same
column (filed Indochina/Comment,
same date):

"Almost four years of air war
in North Vietnam," reported the
CIA, "have shown - as did the
Korean War - that, although air
strikes will destroy transport
facilities, equipment and
supplies, they cannot success-
fully interdict the flow supplies
... "

President Nixon, however, has
largely ignored the lessons of
NSSM-1.