

'We Are Not Targeting the DiKE System'

By JOHN McLAUGHLIN

WASHINGTON—When the President stated on April 30, July 3 and July 27 that United States bombing policy was to avoid targeting of North Vietnamese dikes, he meant exactly that, and his orders are lucidly understood and scrupulously enforced all along the military chain of command.

I have recently returned from a trip to Southeast Asia, under White House assignment, where I spoke with Navy and Air Force flyers in South Vietnam, in the Gulf of Tonkin, and in Udorn and Utapao in Thailand, with Army intelligence and photo-surveillance officers. All affirm that it has been emphasized and re-emphasized to them that North Vietnamese dikes are not authorized targets.

Nothing could be clearer to me than the fact that the bombing policy of the United States Government excludes all direct targeting of North Vietnamese dikes. In fact, no target in which there is a substantial probability of significant loss of civilian life has been approved under U.S. policy. We are not now targeting the dike system of North Vietnam, nor has the United States ever attacked that system. The charge that we have struck the dikes deliberately is a falsification.

This does not mean that no bombs have fallen on the dikes or near them. The dike system in North Vietnam is a massive and intricate network, long enough to span the entire United

States from coast to coast. Most of this mileage is concentrated in an area less than one-fortieth the size of Texas. Bombing operations cannot be carried out against bona fide military targets without expecting some secondary damage to this congested honeycomb.

Even though this accidentally inflicted injury can be repaired within a single day, some impairments are left untouched for the sake of public viewing. If the North Vietnamese wanted to, however, by the time Westerners were back in Hanoi after their meticulously guided (as eye-witness columnist Joseph Kraft has described in his reports from Hanoi) field "inspector tours" this damage could be wholly patched up.

Indeed, the North Vietnamese are having problems with their dikes. This is not due to American bombing, however; it is due to the flood of 1971, the worst in 100 years. Newspaper editorials and radio transmissions speak of the flood of 1971 as "a catastrophe, many painful memories of which are still fresh in our minds." In Hanoi *Moi*, the Hanoi daily, June 29, the Mayor of Hanoi, Tran Duy Hung, lamented that in some places "the repair of the dike portions that were damaged by torrential rain in 1971 has not yet met technical requirements." Another newspaper, *Hoc Tap*, editorialized that "weak party committees which did not satisfactorily fulfill their duty during the antifo-

struggle must be replaced by capable people whose quality has been tested."

The dike problem really stems, of course, from an inhuman inversion of priorities. Instead of repairing the leaks in the dikes with their military manpower at home, and devoting their other resources, human and technological, to rebuilding the dikes damaged by the flood of 1971, the North Vietnamese leaders have debauched their nation's priorities by sending their manpower south in a destructive, expansionist lunge.

Faced with this state of affairs, the North Vietnamese are now trying to put the monkey on our back: they are trying to make it appear that we are responsible for the construction weaknesses of their dikes, weaknesses caused by the flood of 1971 and by their military ambitions in the south. Unreflective opinionating on the part of influential, highminded but, sadly, ill-informed religious leaders living outside South Vietnam can contribute to a crisis in conscience for some Americans, a synthetic one, but nevertheless tormenting.

Within South Vietnam—the country directly affected by the North Vietnamese onslaught—the 180 Protestant and the 2,000 Catholic clergymen (including all 58 resident Jesuits) uniformly believe that continued self-defense is licit, necessary, moral and upright—even though they abhor war and yearn for peace.

They further uniformly believe that the help being given by the United States—including the mining of the harbor and the interdiction bombing—is likewise licit, moral, necessary and upright.

All the Buddhists leaders of the An Quang League, moreover, with whom I spoke in Hue, Danang and Saigon also resolutely support the self-defense of South Vietnam against North Vietnamese encroachment. The indigenous South Vietnamese clergy and the 400 non-South Vietnamese clergymen working in South Vietnam are no less morally sensitive or theologically well-trained than are those clergymen in this country or abroad who condemn U.S. policy in a fact vacuum.

Conspicuous in this regard is Dr. Eugene Carson Blake, General Secretary of the World Council of Churches. On the basis of a discredited 500-word news item, Dr. Blake has charged that the United States is bombing North Vietnam's dike system intentionally. His accusation is egregiously unfounded. The failure of Dr. Blake to do his homework is all the more reprehensible since his "confirmation" influenced the Secretary General of the United Nations into an international berse as embarrassing to United Nations' diplomacy as is Dr. Blake's to the World Council's credibility.

The Rev. John McLaughlin, S.J., is a deputy special assistant to the President, serving as a speechwriter.

SEE & SEP 72

18 SEP 72