

Nixon Orders Heavy Raids By B-52's in North Vietnam

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WASHINGTON, April 14—Administration officials disclosed today that President Nixon had ordered large B-52 strikes throughout the 200-mile long southern panhandle of North Vietnam and that the objectives were diplomatic and political as well as military.

Up to 150 of the heavy bombers, it was said, will participate in the attacks, representing by far the most extensive use of them in the war. Two B-52 raids on the North have been announced this week, the first since 1967, but they were not extremely heavy.

Officials described the bombing as entailing a calculated risk in view of the possibility that intensive use of the planes might create a negative reaction here and abroad and that several of the relatively slow-moving bombers might be shot down. But the potential

gains, the officials said, were regarded by Mr. Nixon and his key planners as important enough to attempt the new strategy. Its objectives, they said, included the following:

¶To choke off the movement of supplies from North Vietnam to the South and thus prevent the North Vietnamese from conducting an effective second phase tank-supported offensive in northern Quang Tri Province.

¶To employ heavy firepower to help Saigon demonstrate that its troops can repulse the most serious attack of the war since the Tet offensive of 1968, thus presumably preventing Vietnam from becoming a

damaging political issue in the current Presidential campaign.

¶To create a new bargaining chip—an offer to stop heavy bombing of the North—either

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to obtain the release of American prisoners of war or to achieve a broad negotiated settlement.

¶Over the longer run, if negotiations fail to scale down the United States air and naval commitment but still deter Hanoi from starting new invasions for fear of rapid American reinforcement and air attack.

In 1966 and 1967, Pentagon sources said, a small number of B-52's were used to hit mountain passes between North Vietnam and Laos feeding into the Ho Chi Minh supply trail complex. But until the two raids this week, the planes had not been employed deep inside North Vietnam.

The principal reason, the officials said, was the fear that the relatively slow and not very maneuverable eight-jet bombers might be easy targets for enemy surface-to-air missiles.

But military planners now believe, particularly after the two missions this week, that the aircraft can survive without substantial losses in the area over North Vietnam through a combination of electronic countermeasure devices, fighter support and special tactics.

The officials said the second raid flown this week struck an airfield and other targets near Thanhhoa, nearly 200 miles north of the buffer zone between North Vietnam and South Vietnam.

"We'll lose some B-52's, no doubt about it," a general commented, "but not a disproportionate number compared to what we'd lose if we used fighter-bombers predominantly. And the B-52's should do a better job."

30 Ton Load of Bombs

A B-52 can carry 30 tons of bombs, 10 times the bomb load of an F-4 Phantom fighter-bomber, a Pentagon official pointed out.

"That means that a half dozen B-52's can do what it took 50 to 60 F-4's to do before," he said, "particularly against area targets, like railroad marshaling yards, ammunition storage areas, petroleum tank farms, truck and tank parks, troop concentrations and barracks, they should be even more effective."

Military planners believe that with the onset of the monsoon rains in most of South Vietnam early next month, enemy troops will reduce their major operations in the Mekong Delta, at Anloc on the front north of Saigon and in the Central Highlands.

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