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Bombing Lessons the President Ignores



Jack Anderson

A SECRET Vietnam study, which President Nixon ordered before he was sworn in, warned that the massive bombing of North Vietnam has 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.

Kissinger then compiled the answers in a bulky National Security Study Memorandum, which became known inside the White House as NSSM-1.

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.

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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."

Even the Defense Department acknowledged that "the bombing did not sig-

nificantly raise the cost of the war" to North Vietnam.

The Joint Chiefs have figured one giant B-52, 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.

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IN ADDITION to the casualties, the Pentagon noted: "The bombing undoubtedly had adverse effects on the people of NVN. Individual citizens suffered many hardships.

"Still, there is no evidence to suggest that these hardships reduced to a critical level NVN's willingness or resolve to continue the conflict." The CIA concurred with this view.

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

There was general agreement, too, that the bombing had not stopped the flow of outside aid to the battlegrounds.

"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 successfully interdict the flow of supplies."

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