

The Hullabaloo About the Dikes

DESPITE REPEATED PUBLIC denials by the President, ten U.S. Senators have asserted that the United States is deliberately and systematically bombing the dikes in North Vietnam and have put forth a resolution to provide that "the United States shall not bomb or otherwise attack by air or sea the dams, dikes or hydraulic system in North Vietnam."

Behind this prospective conferring of sanctuary upon all missile sites and other military facilities the North Vietnamese choose to locate on or near dikes, is some curious logic expressed by Senator Kennedy. If, he said, the bombing of targets near dikes results in damage to a dike "then the dike itself is being bombed as deliberately as if the dike itself were the target." This is as much as to say that if a hunter shooting at a deer accidentally wings another hunter, then he is guilty of assault with intent to murder.

THE ADMINISTRATION ADMITS that 12 dikes have indeed been damaged, accidentally, by the bombing of "legitimate" military targets nearby. Hanoi reports, however, that 137 dikes have been severely damaged by deliberate and sustained bombing and what is more, U.S. artillery is now engaging in chemical warfare. There is, as the White House has repeatedly asserted, an odor of Hanoi propaganda in such allegations — propaganda of no little effectiveness.

In this connection, Sir Robert Thompson, the British guerrilla warfare expert who commanded the successful anti-Communist fighting in Malay, has recently offered comment. "The Western conscience," he said, "is immediately pricked by an American-committed atrocity, such as Mylai (but) little or no attention, and certainly no equivalent reporting, has been given to similar Viet Cong and North Vietnamese atrocities . . . on a scale that makes Mylai almost insignificant."

He cites numerous examples of North Vietnamese rocket and artillery demolitions of entire villages and recalls the massacre of 5700 civilians in Hue in 1968 by invading North Vietnamese. His point is well illustrated by the uproar over alleged American bombing of dikes, and the casual acceptance of the verified execution of 250 Saigon government officials and imprisonment of 6000 civilians by the North Vietnamese in their recent occupation of north Binh Dinh province.