

How the Second Term Begins

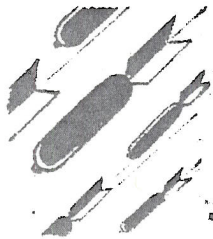
by Mary McGrory

Washington

THE DREAM OF the mellow second-term statesman has been shattered, and it is the President himself who wakened us to reality.

He is doing what he said last July 27 he would never do.

"We are not going to bomb civilian targets in the North," the President declared at the height of the furor over the reported dike bombing. "We are not using the great power that could finish North Vietnam in an afternoon, and we will not."



The bully-bombing has few defenders. The President has not troubled to explain it. The Republican leader of the Senate, Hugh Scott of Pennsylvania, the famous hawk who nominated Richard Nixon for the Nobel Peace prize last summer, attempted to ascribe human feelings to him in the present crisis.

He was, Scott said, "heartsick and disappointed," and he "suspected" that the "President is disappointed and sick at heart, too."

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THE EVIDENCE WAS to the contrary. The President was of rare good cheer. On the third day of the bombing, he noisily intervened in behalf of football fans whose holidays would be desecrated by the television blackout of the big games.

On the evening of the fifth day—which is to say, the day after Hanoi reported that United States bombers had hit a POW camp—the President was discovered, with his friend Bebe Rebozo, dining out at a Florida restaurant. He was dancing. He invited a startled 11-year-old girl to be his partner.

What was he trying to tell us? Was he suggesting that the slaughter from the air was, in the immortal words of Lt. Calley at the My Lai court-martial, "no big deal"? Americans are expected to look on, without pity or remorse, while a peasant nation is punished for his failure.

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AS AT THE TIME of My Lai, the outrage had to be imported.

No American put it as ferociously as an English newspaper, the Manchester Guardian, which inquired "if Mr. Nixon wants to go down in history as one of the most murderous and bloodthirsty of American Presidents."

And what do Americans think of the deeds being done in their name? A few brave clergymen have spoken out, and a Senator or two.

Many Americans spent their holidays soothed into obliviousness by their television sets, mesmerized by the profitable violence of professional football or the artificial cheer of the canned holiday Christmas programs.

The uproar over the conviction of Lt. Calley for the My Lai murders gave Richard Nixon pertinent intelligence for the present crisis. Americans will spend four more Christmases cursing the war rather than face up to what we have done and what we are doing.

The landslide is turning into a world tragedy because it has been taken by the President as a passport to vengeance, and so far by Congress as a warning that there is nothing they can do to stop him.

Washington Star Service

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