

# ... And Some Thoughts on the Outcry Against It

By Kenneth Crawford

ATTEMPTS TO whip up a new wave of moral outrage at the intensified bombing of North Vietnam have so far been frustrating to the moralists. Opinion polls indicate substantial public approval of President Nixon's decision to withdraw American ground forces from South Vietnam and to use only naval and air power to help the South Vietnamese stand off attacks from the North. Sen. George McGovern's promise to stop the bombing forthwith if he is elected President has not improved his prospects measurably.

Yet McGovern persists. He has moderated his stance only to the extent of suggesting that he might keep an air force in Asia long enough to assure release of U.S. war prisoners, presumably equipped with bombs capable of exploding. Sen. William Fulbright is still asking Americans not to forget pictures of a little Vietnamese girl napalmed by mistake in a raid on her village. Ramsey Clark, recently back from an inspection tour of North Vietnam, bids the American conscience revolt against the spectacle of a mighty Western power picking on a primitive little Asian country. Jane Fonda, after a similar tour, calls Mr. Nixon a war criminal and advocates his impeachment.

Why hasn't America responded to these outcries? Have its moral sensibilities atrophied? Has it become so accustomed to the violence of war that it no longer notices? Is it, as some of the sensitive critics of U.S. warmaking imply, so callous that it is unmoved by the suffering of the little brown people of Asia so long as its big, brawny soldiers are relatively safe? Or, as Fulbright guesses, are the American people really "offended and outraged by this useless killing" and only waiting for an opportunity to express their feelings?

It would be unfair and perhaps untrue to attribute political or anything but humanitarian motives to those who denounce the present American course in Vietnam. McGovern opposed the war long before he emerged as a presidential candidate. Jane Fonda forthrightly sides with the North Vietnamese on the assumption that any leftist revolution improves a miserable world. Fulbright, almost since he sponsored the Gulf of Tonkin resolution, giving President Johnson a free hand in Vietnam, has been trying to correct his record on the war. This mission has come to seem obsessive.

Clark is something else. He isn't running for anything and he has no record to expunge unless, as a cabinet officer in the Johnson administration, he feels some measure of responsibility for policies wholly outside the Attorney General's jurisdiction. His

revulsion against the bombing seems sincere and heartfelt. He has testified before a Senate committee not only that he sees no moral justification for the bombing but that he sees no military purpose in it.

This is puzzling. The only explanation for it would appear to be almost incredible naivete. Clark concedes that his only military expertise was gained as a corporal in the Marine Corps. But, morality apart, it doesn't take a military genius to recognize the military purpose of the air war. It is to destroy guns, munitions and other materiel before they reach the battlefields of the South to be used by enemies against friends. Also to kill enemy soldiers before they can kill their enemies.

The American military insists that it has never deliberately bombed civilian targets—only military-related installations such as power plants and areas in which anti-aircraft guns and other ordnance have been installed or stored. Obviously some bombs, especially those dropped by B-52s from high altitudes and without benefit of "smart" guidance systems, go astray. There is no reason to doubt the word of the Pentagon in all this. Strategists have learned in previous wars, and relearned in this one, that bombing to terrorize civilian populations is self-defeating, that it tends to stiffen rather than weaken morale.

The North Vietnamese have shrewdly exploited American squeamishness from the start. They have stored military supplies and mounted missiles along dikes and then charged, through Clark and others, that dikes and civilian centers are being bombed to wipe out civilian populations. They have made a practice of hiding military personnel in civilian areas both in North and South Vietnam, making it impossible to get at soldiers without molesting civilians. The inevitable consequences are cited in support of the charge that the Americans are bent on genocide.

Clark talks as though the gallant North Vietnamese were fighting with bows and arrows against B-52s. The fact is that the North Vietnamese are equipped with the best the Soviet Union and China have to offer, or were until Moscow and Peking cooled a little toward Hanoi's cause—Sam missiles, heavy tanks, Mig fighter planes and all the rest except long-range bombers. The discipline North Vietnamese imposes upon its people has produced one of the best modern armies in the world—comparable with Israel's.

North Vietnam is not, as Clark would have it, a David fighting a Goliath. It is merciless in its military operations, indifferent to civilian as to military casualties, as its ongoing guerrilla warfare and its several offensives have demonstrated.

The reason the war in Vietnam has gone on so long and so taxed the patience of America is that American strategists have not countered in kind. They have limited their tactics and strategy as well as their objective.

Somewhere, it was assumed, there had to be an unhappy medium between ruthless destruction of cities, dikes and countryside and overly sensitive limitation of means. Mr. Nixon thought he had found it by blockading ports and bombing military supplies as close to their source as possible. But it is questionable how well this is working. The most recent Communist attack in the Que-son valley and intelligence reports that the enemy is still re-supplying himself through the blockade at 25 per cent or more of the pre-blockade rate are disquieting. North Vietnam's ingenuity and tenacity threaten to prolong the war even more unless Mr. Nixon finds a formula this side of surrender or unless McGovern is elected on his promise to withdraw from Indo-China unconditionally.

There is no such thing as a benign war. People, helpless, innocent people, get killed. The only way to avoid this kind of killing is not to fight wars. Yet, but for war, Adolph Hitler would probably now be ruling Europe; Israel would be a forlorn memory; Saigon would be Ho Chi Minh City and all of Indo-China would be as strictly regimented as North Vietnam is. It is not immorality that inoculates Americans against the fervor of Fonda, Fulbright, Clark and McGovern. Rather, it is the suspicion that the sell-out of Saigon would be essentially more immoral than the bombing of North Vietnam.