

THE STATES-ITEM

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The States-Item prints the news impartially. It supports what it believes to be right. It opposes what it believes to be wrong, without regard to party politics.

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Nixon's bombing policy

President Nixon's bombing policy in North Vietnam has been noteworthy for its poor judgment and demonstrated lack of control. At no time has this been clearer than in the risky Hanoi raid that killed five employees in the French diplomatic headquarters and seriously injured that nation's chief diplomat in the city.

It is hard to condone either the raid, which brought U.S. planes within two and a half miles of the French mission, or the administration's reaction to the disaster.

The bombing, which damaged the French, Algerian and Indian diplomatic headquarters, raises several questions.

—Why should the military be picking targets so close to downtown Hanoi, with its concentration of nonmilitary civilians, at a time when private peace talks being conducted by presidential adviser Henry Kissinger are supposedly at a "sensitive" stage? In this case the target was a railroad yard at the edge of Hanoi, but a Canadian television correspondent watched U.S.

jets dive "very low over the heart of the city."

— In the face of this eyewitness documentation, Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird makes a feeble attempt to shove the blame off on the North Vietnamese, raising the possibility that Communist surface-to-air missiles did the damage. At the same time, a message of regret for the damage was also issued by Secretary of State William P. Rogers. Efforts to explain away the blame are futile, in any event, since the incident would not have occurred if the administration were not conducting saturation bombing raids.

— Most important, where is control over this nation's air war in Vietnam? We are now told that restrictions have been placed on bombing around Hanoi and that the Nixon Administration must approve these targets. Most Americans have assumed, after the unauthorized bombings conducted under the direction of Lt. Gen. John D. Lavelle, that the Nixon Administration had seized firm control of the military operation. Apparently they were wrong.