

**Editorials** SFChronicle

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# The Hanoi Air Raid Tragedy

**THE FRENCH GOVERNMENT**, it would appear, has shown considerable restraint in its expressions of protest over the Hanoi bombing incident. Both President Pompidou and Herve Alphan, the Foreign Ministry's director general who was formerly ambassador at Washington, avoided any display of asperity, scorn or sarcasm in statements deploring this tragic blunder, which the London Times accurately says "almost defies analysis."

The French were entitled to be deeply indignant, not alone over the bombing of their mission by a plane or planes three miles off their target, which was the railway marshaling yards on the opposite side of the Red River, but also over the lame and implausible suggestion of Secretary Laird that it might have been a North Vietnamese rocket that did the damage.

**LAIRD'S STATEMENT** posing the possibility that the blame should fall on Hanoi was quickly contradicted by witnesses to the attack on the French mission. Among these was a French newspaperman, Jean Thoraval, who was on the premises. Claiming to know from experience between

the damage caused by a bomb and that caused by a missile, he reports that he can testify that the explosion could not have been caused by a rocket.

The indignation which many Americans are showing over the death, injury and damage caused by the miscarriage of the Navy raid has its share of irony. They are upset because the sufferers are members of the French diplomatic establishment and our allies. But when, as usually happens where air raids miscarry, the victims are North Vietnamese civilians, that is shrugged off.

**THE LONGER THE AIR BOMBING** goes on the less decisive it appears to be, despite our having deposited greater tonnages than were dropped in World War II. In any event, it is difficult to understand why, especially at this moment, we are bombing the heart of Hanoi if, as the White House has said, negotiations with the North Vietnamese are at a sensitive stage.

It has been suggested, though without confirmation that the injured French diplomat in Hanoi, Pierre Susini, was playing a part in peace talks with the North Vietnamese. The prompt dispatch of the French ambassador at Peking to replace him in Hanoi underlies this speculation. Why the military would jeopardize these affairs by a close-in raid, as they once before jeopardized peace hopes by bombing North Vietnam when Premier Kosygin was there, does truly defy analysis.