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Excerpts from Bay Area Institute report, 7 p.m., Franz Schurmann and Marty Gehlen, on the renewed bombing of North Vietnam by the United States military.

Gehlen: I'm sure everyone in our audience was ~~stunned~~<sup>MM</sup> on Dec. 18 when it was announced that the United States was bombing North Vietnam again, this time not by Navy or Air Force fighter-bombers, but by the gigantic B52s. As it so happened, the United States was waging a new type of war against North Vietnam, ~~the type of saturation bombing~~ the cities of North Vietnam, and that is a war of saturation bombing. And this is apparently the first time this has occurred in the history of the war as we have known it. Our show tonight is going to deal with the politics behind the bombing. Why it was that Nixon started bombing North Vietnam again, how his renewal of the bombing is related to the political struggle over some type of ceasefire, and what's going to happen in the future: what are his options, what can he do? First of all I'd like to ask Franz what he thinks the causes were for the renewal of the bombing. Everyone was sceptical originally when the ceasefire was ~~announced~~ announced, But at the same time I think that people thought that maybe the war would come to an end, and all of a sudden ...a bomb was dropped in our lap, as it were, and North Vietnam is bombed harder than ever.

SCHURMANN: I think realistically there are only three ways of explaining what happened. One, that Nixon perpetrated fraud and from the beginning had no intention of signing a ceasefire, that he was pulling the North Vietnamese along, perhaps in order to prevent them from ~~mounting~~ mounting a final offensive in the autumn of this year, and that then when he came very close to an agreement he pulled back and did what he always wanted to do, which was to re-unleash his air force and navy in North Vietnam, so that fraud is one possibility.

The second possibility is one that's cited by a number of people who say Thieu interposed his veto power, would not go along with a ceasefire agreement, and that therefore Nixon backed down and resumed the war. In fact that's an explanation that seems to be very popular among the antiwar liberals like Averill Harriman.

The third possibility is that what has happened is simply a rightwing takeover in Washington, particularly on the part of the military who never were very keen about a ceasefire and had their own reasons for wanting to continue the war.

[ sentence or two missing due to tape change] ...Given Nixon's reputation as Tricky Dick, the fraud explanation would be most believable, but the reason I think the fraud explanation doesn't hold is ~~that~~ that a president of a powerful country ~~throughout~~ like the United States does <sup>have</sup> ~~has~~ to maintain a certain amount of credibility throughout the world, that is to say that not just in regard to Vietnam but in regard to all sorts of other things, and if he had perpetrated fraud, if he intended to perpetrate fraud all along, consciously, there are a number of things he wouldn't have done. And one of these things I would like to cite is that on three occasions he sent a letter to Premier Pham Van Dong of North Vietnam, direct letters...signed by the president of the United States, saying that the agreements that had been concluded in Paris were complete. That was mentioned by Radio Hanoi several times, way back in the end of October and the early part of November, just before and just after the election. That Nixon himself had said the agreements were complete, and the only thing Nixon balked at was the signing date, and apparently insisted that the signing date be put off until after the election.

Now it seems to me that when one considers that the agreement was not just a piece of paper that's worked on -- it's like in labor-management negotiations where lots of things happen on the labor side and the management side while these negotiations are going on, things start moving, people start preparing for a ceasefire. In fact there were active preparations throughout South Vietnam for a ceasefire, both to observe it and to violate it. So that wheels started moving, presumably also on the side of the liberation forces. Now if Nixon had perpetrated fraud, I think he would not have done it in so crude a fashion, in a fashion that has made him lose about as much credibility as a President can lose under the circumstances. And I think the notion that this was an elaborate fraud, perpetrated with knowledge and forethought by Nixon, is also untenable on another ground: the Vietnamese are so up to every one of Nixon's possible tricks, that if it had been fraud, if there had been no real preparations for a ceasefire, they would have known it, they would not have gone so far.



Now at the end~~off~~ of 1963, as Kennedy was withdrawing ~~troops~~ -- he was withdrawing troops from South Vietnam, a program called phased withdrawal -- they also began to put pressure on Diem, and pressure of course resulted in the assassination of Diem, and his replacement by Big Minh. There's been a lot of controversy ~~of~~ ~~about~~ as to what Kennedy's real intentions were, but one of the explanations that has been offered was that ~~Kennedy~~ what Kennedy wanted above all was someone in power who'd be more amenable to American control than was Ngo Dinh Diem. Diem was arrogant man, a rather a very haughty and ~~independent~~ independent ~~one~~ minded man, and even though he was ~~an~~ pretty nasty figure, nevertheless he was not a puppet; this was generally recognized even by the North Vietnamese, ~~and~~ that he was a sort of foreeful figure in his own right. In October, suddenly word began to leak out of South Vietnam that Diem was threatening to negotiate directly with Hanoi, over the head of the United States. In other words, if the United States was going to continue to undercut him, as it was doing -- it particularly wanted to get rid of his brother, [Ngo Dinh] Nhu, -- and by the way Kennedy not only threatened to cut off aid to Diem, but did. He cut off aid to Diem's special forces which left Saigon and went out into the field, and at the time the palace was left unprotected Diem fled, and a day or so later was murdered. How serious Diem was is very hard to say, and our listeners might be interested to know that Mme. Diem [ does he mean Mme. Nhu?] who's still alive and living in Rome now said about three years ago -- it was published in the New York Times -- that he husband very seriously intended to do exactly that. Either he would blackmail the United States to continue to support him, but if the United States sold him out, then he would turn around and make a deal with Hanoi.

That instance, I think, is reasonably well attested now to give it some credibility, so I think it's not at all impossible that Thieu, in effect, was telling Nixon that if you persist in making this deal with the North Vietnamese, I may simply -- as you said -- switch sides, or make a deal on my own. Accomodations, as they're called, are very common. This may also explain why, as the rumors of a ceasefire were spreading, and active preparations were being made, an incredible invasion of Americans took place in South Vietnam. Suddenly all sorts of military types took off their uniforms and put on civilian clothes .

This incredible quantity of airplanes were brought into South Vietnam. Some of them ~~came from far away Iran~~ were taken out of Nationalist China and as far away as Iran. The South Vietnamese don't have enough pilots to fly those planes, obviously they would have to be flown by Americans as they were originally. So in a way you could say that this rapid introduction of material was not so much to fight the war but to reassert American control, over that regime. So I think that is a very credible explanation, namely that you escalate the war against the North as a means of maintaining control in the South, and this ~~also~~ also brings up a point [we talked of earlier] that there's no way of looking at this bombing as having come from a position of strength. They've had enough experience with the air war to know they can destroy all of Hanoi and all of Haiphong, and they're not going to do any more damage to the North Vietnamese war effort than they have, there are no real military targets in Hanoi or Haiphong and there haven't been any for a long time. So if it was done out of weakness, there still must have been some reason why this occurred, and I think this explanation, that it was a way of reasserting control, bringing Thieu -- in other words, -- Thieu is a real blackmailer -- he either says let me continue to be your puppet, in which case you bomb the north and you ~~continue~~ support me and continue the war effort, or if now I'll cease being your puppet and make a deal with the enemy. I think this kind of blackmail did operate, and was a real reason.

Gehlen: <sup>by</sup> Then there's the third factor we mentioned: the assertion ~~of~~ the United States military of its desires and its aims in Indochina, and it seems at this point that the military which has always wanted to show that the war could be ended by force, and that the United States could achieve its aims in Vietnam by military force, have somehow come to a head, that they are trying to demonstrate this more or less in one <sup>form</sup> ~~way~~ or another.

Schurmann: My personal feeling -- I think what we're seeing here is more than just a desperate move to keep the war going or maintain control of South Vietnam. I think that what we're witnessing is something I had not expected...A rather remarkable shift to the right in the Washington scene as a whole, both in domestic and foreign affairs.

I think there were indications a number of weeks ago that -- or even before the election -- that Nixon was moving away from the right wing, for whatever reasons. Certainly any indications there were to that effect have vanished completely, and I think what we're seeing now is a rather alarming shift to the right, and the entry of real right wing forces -- who have always been there all along, but with a reassertion of power on the part of the right wing forces. Now this is ~~clearly~~ obviously true of the military, ~~and~~ the two chief services in the military, namely the Navy and the Air Force -- I also myself now believe that the most powerful of these military services <sup>now</sup> is the Navy, although the Air Force runs a very close second. I don't think the Army has much power left in politics in Washington, and in some ways it never really <sup>had</sup> that much power, not since the early days after the second war. I think it's <sup>common</sup> ~~common~~ knowledge by now that the military have always been on the extreme hawk side of the fence. That is to say they wanted to fight the war to some sort of final victory, that they've never been very keen about the negotiations in Paris. I think the Navy made this point very explicitly a month or a month and a half ~~ago~~ ago when on a nice clear day they bombed the French embassy in Hanoi. They had their planes circling around making sure it was the French embassy and bombed it, and killed ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup>, I guess it was the political officer, Pierre Susini, at the time. So I think the evidence is fairly strong that they've never liked the idea of a war concluded by some sort of compromise in some sort of negotiations, and they wanted to win -- It's <sup>as</sup> ~~Barry~~ Barry Goldwater and James Buckley and other rightwingers like John Tower have said all along, they wanted a victory. They wanted to demonstrate that force could procure for the United States ~~whatever~~ whatever it wanted to get, that force ~~would~~ <sup>will</sup> win out and that military power ~~would~~ <sup>will</sup> achieve goals.

If one looks at military doctrine over the past 25 years, the role of airpower both for the Navy and the Air Force has been central. Victory through air power. That's not just been a slogan that they bandied about, but it's been a notion that whether it's strategic air power or tactical air power, that air planes can make the difference in a battlefield situation, air planes, ~~and~~ air power can win the war. So obviously air power has not done very well in the Vietnam war.

The B52s have done a lot of bombing, but not in areas where there's been any active defense. And for years Gen. Curtis Lemay, when he was chief of staff of the Air Force, used to say that manned bombers can always get through Soviet air defenses. And when people would say no they can't because missiles are so highly developed and can shoot down these planes, he would say no, there's a future for the manned bomber. For years the Air Force has been defending the notion of manned bombers, whereas the evidence seems to be mounting that they're expensive, they're not very useful, either for strategic or tactical purposes, and there's always a lot of pressure not to have new bomber programs. So the military naturally would like to demonstrate they can send their B52s over Hanoi with acceptable losses, and wipe out ~~half~~ Hanoi and show the effectiveness of manned bombers, in addition to which they still believe as they did eight years ago that a good dose of heavy bombing will bring the North Vietnamese to the conference table. And the same thing applies to the Navy. They've for years argued that we should have more carriers, even though they cost ~~upwards~~ <sup>upwards</sup> of One billion dollars a piece, because they can deliver air power right in close to enemy shores, and tactical air power can destroy military targets, cut supply lines, etc. etc. The military never has changed its tune. It has wanted to demonstrate again and again either that saturation bombing works and will break the will of the enemy, in the case of the Air Force, ~~and~~ <sup>or</sup> in the case of the Navy that tactical air power can destroy enemy supply lines, dry up the oil, etc. etc. That ~~thrust~~ <sup>thrust</sup> has always been there. It's a very crude, simple thrust, doesn't have to be explained. It's not a military desire to fight for fighting's sake, it's a military desire for victory and to show that a certain kind of military power is the decisive factor -- not diplomacy, not negotiations, not anything else -- force will procure the United States what it wants.

Gehlen: Why has this thrust emerged right now? At this point in the history of the war and the negotiations? Maybe I could phrase my question another way: What is happening and what is going to happen? Why is Nixon leaning more toward the right wing and how is this affecting his whole position on Vietnam?

Schurmann: The nature of American politics in Washington is more obscure than the darkest recesses of the Kremlin, of the court of Byzantium, or of some of the more obscure Chinese Dynasties. But I think if one looks at the Nixon regime, the first term, the first two years there was a kind of marking of time. Nixon was elected and continued the war and he did a number of other things. But in the last two years I would say there was a clear shift toward the center. Nixon called himself a Keynesian, Kissinger began to play a more prominent role, Nixon began to [word missed] wage and price control, which have always been considered -- you know, John Kenneth Galbraith has always been ~~considered~~ one of the big advocates of wage and price control -- and of course he went to China and he went to Russia, and concluded the ~~ATTORX~~ SALT agreements, and the military traditionally has not been in favor of any kind of arms control agreements. So I would say that during the last two years of his first term there seemed to be a secular shift toward the center, toward what certain radical people would call a more corporate liberal approach to problems. And I think a lot of people, myself included, felt that once the election were over Nixon would use that mandate that he gained to continue that shift, so that then the United States could face the larger problems -- the loss of its interest in Latin America, the loss of its interests or its whole shaky position of the dollar, and the variety of problems at home, and so on and so on. I think that the Vietnam war has become symbolically and practically ~~identified with~~ identified with right wing interests. Certainly the first people who came out and spoke openly of their glee and joy at the resumption of the bombing were James Buckley, the conservative senator from New York, John Tower of Texas and Congress <sup>man</sup> Hebert of Louisiana. In fact Hebert himself came out an exonerated Lavelle and said Lavelle did the right thing; You know Lavelle was knocked down by Air Force chief of staff John Ryan, fired by chief of staff John Ryan, and Spiro T. Agnew himself implied that Lavelle -- The Senate censured Lavelle, demoted him at the time. What I feel has happened has been a right wing counterattack in the Nixon regime against centrist tendencies. This is particularly true of the Navy, which has always been the most conservative and reactionary of the armed services.



And it happened in other areas.....[as shown in] some of the appointments in the new Nixon administration. My own feeling is that what he has done is appointed kind of namby pamby types like Elliott Richardson, or so-called systems analysts -- or modular men as he likes to call them -- at top positions, but in other more important positions, figures that have been associated with conservative or right wing interests, such as the deputy secretary of defense, a Texas oil man....

GEHLEN: William P. Clements.

Schurmann: William P. Clements.

Gehlen: That's even more clear in areas like Housing and Urban Development where Nixon appointed a man who was nothing more than just a bureaucrat, a Cleveland lawyer who knows nothing about housing, or Cities. About the only thing he knows is simply that he's lived in a city and a suburb, and he's lived in a house, and that's about it. And similarly for the Department of Transportation, Nixon nominated in this case a senior vice president of the Union Oil Co. who is a financial analyst, knows very little about transportation planning at all. And not just right wingers, but in some cases there are purely appointments to meet the very specific interests groups, very clear interest groups, in the case of the Secretary of Transportation. Certainly earlier in the case of Earl Butz, who was nominated for Secretary of Agriculture in '71, who was the head of Ralston Purina. This is very true. Nixon's appointments are -- do portend some type of real right wing direction to his next administration.

Schurmann: If these tendencies continue, I think one may face a very dangerous situation in which -- I don't know where one should come down, on which side of the fence. But I do sense now that Nixon has suffered an enormous loss of power and influence. Because he, in a way, committed himself to end this war. He may not have intended to, but he so committed himself. And if he's not able to end this war, he'll lose a lot of power and influence in the government that he has. He may, in effect, turn out to be in the next four years to be an Eisenhower. ~~He~~

Not even have the strength that Eisenhower had on occasion, the strength to say no to some of the more horrendous projects being proposed. So I see the situation here as -- it's alarming in this society to have a powerful president, as the case of Johnson demonstrated. But it's equally alarming, given the fact that the president has his finger on the little nuclear box, to have a president with little power, who's weak and vacillating as Nixon has indicated himself to be.

I do think it's the evidence of presidential ~~weakness~~ <sup>weakness,</sup> coupled with this rather amazing rightwing resurgence in the command posts of power, that is the ultimate explanation for the resumption of this bombing.

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