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Back to the Stone Age

With the opportunity safely to disengage American military personnel and prisoners from the Vietnamese conflict now rapidly receding, President Nixon has resorted once more to naked force to try to obtain his own larger objectives in Southeast Asia—objectives which are neither realistic nor essential to this country's security interests. However much Hanoi may be responsible for disrupting the negotiations—which is a highly disputed point, civilized man will be horrified at the renewed spectacle of the world's mightiest air force mercilessly pounding a small Asian nation in an abuse of national power and disregard of humanitarian principles.

Administration spokesmen have suggested that the renewed bombing is designed to forestall an anticipated Communist offensive. There is little evidence to support such a prospect. In fact, American military spokesmen have long been arguing that Communist troops are not now capable of mounting any serious threat to Saigon's massive and heavily-armed forces.

Although the bombs unquestionably are aimed at military targets, there can be no doubt that they will inflict terrible suffering on civilians in the heavily populated Hanoi-Haiphong area and other population centers. By thus raising the cost of continuing resistance, the President evidently hopes to induce North Vietnam's leaders to abandon their struggle of nearly three decades and agree to his terms. Even if this were morally acceptable, all past experience argues against its success.

North Vietnam may yet be bombed "back to the stone age," as an Air Force general once suggested. In the process, the United States itself is in danger of being reduced to a kind of stone age barbarism that could destroy some of what is most worth preserving in American civilization.