

Unanswered Questions

AFTER A 36-HOUR CHRISTMAS LULL, American bombs were raining on North Vietnam again yesterday in a resumption of an aerial blitz of unprecedented dimensions — one in which Hanoi claims some 40,000 tons of bombs were dumped on cities and towns last week alone — aggregating an explosive power equal to that of the atom bomb that fell on Hiroshima.

These raids have inflicted incalculable losses in life and property, including, Hanoi reports, 53 U.S. warplanes, among them 17 B-52s — 11 according to U.S. figures. They have also raised questions at home while evoking speculation and forthright denunciation abroad.

In the absence of comment from the White House or the Defense Department, it is supposed that the bombing onslaught is intended to force Hanoi into a return to negotiations. World comment is largely to the effect, however, that this is "a blunder of tragic magnitude," that Hanoi cannot be clubbed back to the conference table, and that its end result will be "unconditional withdrawal" of U.S. forces from Indochina.

AN IMPRESSIVE AND PERHAPS significant indication of sentiment at home has been disclosed by the Congressional Quarterly, which reached 73 Senators and found 45 opposed to the bombing. The result must seem to point to another attempt at the coming session of Congress to cut off funds for the support of U.S. forces in Indochina.

As matters now stand, there is a bloody, costly stalemate wherein Hanoi refuses to negotiate until the bombing stops, and the U.S. refuses to stop bombing until negotiations resume.

As of now, the American public can do little more than echo the statement of London's Daily Express: "There may be a good reason for this abrupt and devastating reversal of American policy. But we should be told loudly and clearly what it is." No doubt, the reasons, strategies and expectations behind that policy are convincing to the President and the military, but they can hardly be convincing to the public, or the foreign critics, until they are revealed.