

Thunder On the Right

by James Reston

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The most impudent explanation of [Nixon's] recent unexplained area bombing of North Vietnam comes from his White House staff: The President was given a "mandate" in the election to carry on the war and the peace as he pleased, and besides, Harry Truman didn't consult anybody when he dropped those atom bombs on Japan!

The most charitable explanation is that he was, as he said himself, "emotionally drained" after the election, physically tired, and personally angry at the haggling in Paris over the peace terms - and ordered the bombing without the usual consultation even with his own staff while he was in one of these periods of gloomy frustration.

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You can read this any way you please, and the amateur and professional psychiatrists have been having a field day with the question ever since the President disappeared and started tossing the bombs around: either he was tired or stale himself, as he feared his players would be, or he was determined to show everybody that he was going to be the boss, an active tough guy who would tolerate no nonsense or advice from anybody, including Henry Kissinger.

One other possible notion here is that he did not go through the normal process of consultation with the Joint Chiefs, the Security Council and his staff precisely because he did not want to listen to the opposition to this cruel bombing he knew he would get.

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