

Wednesday
October 11, 1967, 7:25 p.m.

Mr. President:

Herewith Bob Ginsburgh undertakes to answer the questions on bombing posed by Rescoe Drummond.

W. W. Rostow

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Pres file

BOMBING POLICY

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1. Why are we bombing? What are its military and political purposes?

In his Johns Hopkins speech on 7 April 1966, President Johnson stated:

"Our objective is the independence of South Vietnam and its freedom from attack . . . We will do everything necessary to reach that objective, and we will do only what is necessary."

Our air campaign is one of the interrelated elements of the allied strategy designed to achieve that objective. Other elements are actions against main force units, pacification, security, revolutionary development, and political and economic development.

As one of the elements in our over-all strategy, there are, as President Johnson pointed out in his speech to the Tennessee Legislature on 15 March 1967:

"Three purposes in selective bombing of military targets in North Vietnam:

"(1) To back our fighting men by denying the enemy a sanctuary.

"(2) To exact a penalty against North Vietnam for her flagrant violations of the Geneva accords of 1954 and 1962.

"(3) To limit the flow or to substantially increase the cost of infiltration of men and materiel from North Vietnam."

2. Is it achieving its purposes?

Yes. However, it has not and cannot reduce NVN's capacity to support the South to the extent that they would be forced to abandon the war in the South. But this was never the purpose of the bombing.

- Bombing has denied North Vietnam a sanctuary

- North Vietnam is paying a heavy penalty for continuing the war.

- We have substantially increased the cost of infiltration of men and materiel from North Vietnam.

- We do not know how successful we have been in limiting the flow because we do not know whether the present level of communist effort in the South is what they consider their optimum strategy or whether it is the best they can or are willing to mount in the face of the bombing. Although we can't predict what the North Vietnamese would do, we can say that if we stopped bombing,

a. They would be able to put men and supplies into the South at lower cost.

b. The resources available to them would be increased, which would enable them to put more into the South or make life in the North easier, or both.

c. It would be a lot easier for them to sweat out the war.

3. What are the objective facts and factors behind the conclusion that the purposes are being achieved?

- At little cost in civilian casualties and with loss rates less than World War II and Korea, the bombing has severely curtailed North Vietnam's industrial and agricultural production. Currently out of operation are: 80% of central electric power generating capacity -- the only modern cement plant -- the only metallurgical plant -- the only explosives plant. Production of coal and apatite, both previously exported in quantity, drastically reduced. Production in the small fertilizer and chemical industry curtailed and production of paper reduced by 80%. In 1966, because of weather and the indirect effects of bombing, NVN's rice crop was 300,000 metric tons short; a similar shortfall is expected this year.

- As a consequence, there has been a radical increase in North Vietnam's requirements for foreign aid in order to sustain her war effort and her economy at minimum levels. Imports are

up from 2,100 metric tons a day in 1965 to 4,300 in 1967; Soviet aid up from \$100 million to \$700 million annually.

- Bombing has required the diversion of up to 600,000 workers to defend against or counter the effects of bombing.

- It has caused the damage or destruction of about 5,000 freight cars, 8,000 trucks, and 19,000 watercraft.

- It has increased substantially the number of men and tons which must be dispatched from the North to get one man or one ton into South Vietnam. We don't know just how much, but we do know that it has (1) caused them to resort to the shorter routes across the DMZ and (2) contributed to their abandoning large-scale operations within South Vietnam.

4. Are there other ways to strike at the enemy supply routes?

Yes:

The following alternatives, however, are politically undesirable under present circumstances:

- Invasion and occupation of North Vietnam.
- Mining or blockade of NVN ports.
- Bombing the dikes.
- Introduction of troops into Laos.

Another alternative is the barrier south of the DMZ; this is underway but as a supplement to bombing because it does not contribute to the first two purposes of the bombing campaign.

5. Is the bombing of industrial targets the best way to persuade Hanoi to negotiate?

- No. The purposes of the bombing, including attacks on NVN's limited industrial base, are described above.

- Hanoi will only be persuaded to negotiate -- or quietly quit when her total costs in the North and South exceed her prospects

for political victory in the South (military victory now being beyond her grasp) and when Hanoi is convinced that U.S. public opinion will not bring about a change in U.S. policy. Thus, the single most important factor in prolonging the war is Hanoi's view on the U.S. will to persist.

6. Haven't most of the targets been pretty thoroughly bombed and, if so, is more bombing worth the cost even in military terms?

- Except for a handful of targets, the most lucrative targets have been bombed.

- In any terms, continued bombing is worthwhile.

a. For the same purposes as originally -- no sanctuary, support effort in South, exact penalty for continuing, and limit or increase cost of infiltration.

b. Targets can be rebuilt.

c. Additional targets have been developed either because of new construction or new intelligence.

d. Without continued bombing, North Vietnam would have greater capability for prosecuting the war as indicated above.

7. What are the objective facts which would bear on the question of whether the air war should be expanded in an effort to immobilize Haiphong through which North Vietnam gets so much of its war materiel? What are the gains?

- A number of targets in the Haiphong area have already been bombed. Attacks on electric power, bridges, roads, and railroads have made it increasingly difficult for NVN to unload supplies and move them out of the port area. Thus, the layover times of ships have increased materially (from 10 days in 1966 to over 30 days in August 1967) as have transit times from Haiphong to points in the interior (Hanoi-Haiphong RR up from 5 hours to 18 hours) and supplies have been piling up within the port area.

- The question of whether additional targets should be attacked is a question of judgment rather than objective fact. It depends on a balancing of estimates of military effectiveness, loss rates, and political and military risks. These factors are considered in detail at the highest levels of government before attacks on additional targets are authorized.

8. What is the risk of Red China or the Soviet Union coming into the war?

- The U.S. seeks no wider war. We do not wish to give them either a cause or an excuse to expand their intervention by massive use of combat troops. (Both are supplying massive military and economic aid, military advisors, and, in the case of China, logistic troops.)

- Both have the capability to intervene. Such intervention would not change the military balance, but it would bring about the wider war which we seek to avoid.

- Thus, the U.S. has sought to make it clear by words and deeds that --

-- Our objectives are limited.

-- We do not seek to destroy the NVN regime.

-- We do not wish to invade and occupy NVN.

-- We have no intention of threatening China, and we make every effort to avoid violating ChiCom sovereignty.

9. Why is the bombing restricted? What is the basis behind the restrictions?

- Restrictions on bombing have been based on the following factors:

-- Our objectives are limited. We have sought to limit the level of violence to the force appropriate to our objectives. Based on moral considerations and U.S. and international public opinion.

-- A humanitarian desire to avoid unnecessary civilian casualties and damage.

-- A strategy of gradually increasing pressures designed to try to bring about a satisfactory settlement at the lowest level of damage to the enemy.

-- Minimization of the risk of a wider war.

-- Incentives from time to time to try to stimulate reciprocal de-escalation or meaningful negotiations.

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