

WAR	HIST
FILE	SUBJ.
DATE	SUB-CAT.
6/1	POST-WAR
1975	END

Page 11—Main Edition—10 April 1975

AIR FORCE MAGAZINE - APRIL 1975 (10)

# Assessing US Reliability as an Ally

By Gen. T. R. Milton, USAF (Ret.)

In December 1972, when the bombing of North Vietnam had resumed with B-52s adding to the tactical air strikes, I received a caller in my NATO office. He was a general, the Danish Military Committee Representative, and he was instructed by his government to register a protest against the air attacks. He did so, perfunctorily but correctly, and then went off the record, so to speak.

It seems that he had been a prisoner of the Germans in 1944. And because he had been captured for underground activities, he was a political prisoner, rather than a military one. Hence, he was in Hamburg in 1944, on a work gang, when the RAF and the Eighth Air Force staged their great Hamburg raids. His point, to be brief, was that even accepting North Vietnamese casualty figures, the US raids on Hanoi were obviously very precise and designed to cause minimum civilian casualties. And that while the tonnage dropped on Hanoi was many times greater than that dropped on Hamburg, the casualties in Hamburg had been many times greater. He wondered why more was not made of the fact that these bombing attacks were, on the evidence, for a military objective—not for terror. Somewhat belatedly, the point has been made.

A more recent commentary on our Vietnam involvement comes from Sir Robert Thompson, who has spent a good part of his life in the counterinsurgency business. He was a principal figure in the successful British Malayan campaign, and following that period he led, from 1961 to 1965, the British Advisory Mission in Vietnam.

In a recent article (*International Defence Review*, December 1974),

Sir Robert reflects on the failure of US strategy in Vietnam. He faults the United States in a number of areas and concludes that the underlying reason for our failure was political irresoluteness. In Sir Robert's judgment, the resumption of the air attacks of December 1972—or even the threat of resuming them—could have won the war and established the basis for a real peace. And he emphasizes that US air support (without US ground troops) was all that was needed. The accuracy and intensity of the attacks were well on the way to reducing to a shambles the entire rear base of the insurgency. However, the whole Western propaganda apparatus seemed to be in the service of the North Vietnamese and, in the end, that proved as effective as the bombing.

We got out of Vietnam just short, in Sir Robert's opinion, of a real victory and hence a real peace. And now, with the Vietnam aid request before Congress, the emotions again surface.

It is a curious state that we have come to, and one that must cause our friends enormous worry. The merits of the Vietnam case are lost in the emotional backwash that comes from any mention of that long-suffering country. And so, apparently, we will let the South Vietnamese go, even though they have confounded the South Vietnam-haters by proving they can and will defend themselves, given the sort of support the Soviets are providing the North Vietnamese. Or, for that matter, a fraction of that support, for that is what the current request amounts to.

We have a few other allies in that part of the world who must be reassessing things at this moment

And not just in that part of the world. The Turks are wonderful friends and implacable enemies. They are, in short, much better with you than against you. The overriding reason for Turkish participation in NATO has always been its desire for alliance with the United States. Now, regardless of anyone's views on the Cyprus matter—and there are, as is usually the case, two sides to that complicated question—Turkey is an important factor in NATO's southern flank and in the Eastern Mediterranean.

A casual look at a map suggests that neutrality might be the expedient thing for a nation whose neighbors are, among others, Russia, Bulgaria, Syria, and Iraq. But, as the Turkish Brigade in Korea demonstrated, courage ranks well above expediency in regulating Turkish behavior. The Soviets would be immensely pleased to see the Turks out of NATO and the US out of Turkey. Soviet threats will never do it. United States ambivalence might. And while friendly relations with Greece are important, being nasty to the Turks is no way to earn back that friendship.

The simple fact is that military alliances, and military aid programs judiciously applied, are the ways a great power these days exercises its power. The other great military power, recently at any rate, seems to understand that. If South Vietnam and Turkey are good examples, we do not.

Sir Robert Thompson takes a gloomy view of things down the road if our Congress denies further aid to South Vietnam.

"There could be," he says, "only one real lesson to be learnt from the Vietnam War—do not rely on the United States as an ally."