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Bombing
 by [Joe Escobar](#) - Thursday, 15 October 2009, 03:14 PM

Discuss the theory behind the American decision to make continual bombing runs over North Vietnam after February 1965. What did American leaders hope to accomplish? In particular, what impact did these actions have on the conflict?

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Re: Bombing
 by [Paul Slaughterbeck](#) - Wednesday, 21 October 2009, 02:56 PM

American leaders hoped to end the war quickly with the use of continual bombing over North Vietnam by both cutting of their infiltration into the south and by generally destroying their will to fight on. One reason this strategy was used was that it would limit American deaths, and thus cause the war to be less divisive and "more palatable at home" (Herring, ALW, p. 173). In other words this was a political move. Lyndon Johnson knew early on that one of his biggest obstacles to the waging of this "war" would be in winning over the American people. In a war with no clear goals, human body count is the number that most cling to when deciding winners and losers. The plan failed miserably. In a logistical sense it failed because North Vietnam had so much equipment (much of it gotten from China and USSR) filtering down the Ho Chi Minh Trail that it could afford to lose most of it. "NVA and NLF troops required only 34 tons of supplies a day from outside South Vietnam, a trickle too small for airpower to stop." (Herring, ALW, p.178) It did not seem to crush the determination of the North Vietnamese either, and may have, in fact, aided them in recruiting fellow Vietnamese against such American brutality. This plan ultimately failed, as well, in bettering the image of the war to the American public. They saw it as "at best inefficient, at worst immoral." (Herring, ALW, p. 179)

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Re: Bombing
 by [Mikco Stiner](#) - Wednesday, 21 October 2009, 09:28 PM

I agree with you on the American leaders wanting to end the war quickly. They were obviously very wrong on that one it didn't end quickly nor did it do a very good job of limiting the deaths of American soldiers, by 1967 13,000 had already died. I find it a bit sad that a lot of them probably didn't even get to choose whether or not they wanted to be there, just kids thrown into this strange place with a gun.

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Re: Bombing
 by [Paul Slaughterbeck](#) - Thursday, 22 October 2009, 10:37 AM

As we saw in the PBS video, even the ones that chose to serve their country often did so under false pretenses and didn't realize until being in Vietnam the mistake they had made. They bought into the ideas of ending communistic spread and of "saving" the S. Vietnamese. They didn't question the government. In other words, some were drafted physically, but many more were sort of drafted mentally, not realizing until too late.

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Rate... **Re: Bombing**by [Rebecca Mellnik](#) - Wednesday, 21 October 2009, 08:29 PM

In 1965, President Johnson wanted the United States to "maintain its international credibility" (Herring, 148) and thought that the United States should do everything they could to appear as if they were stepping up and helping a struggling country, South Vietnam. Many government officials, including the president believed that increased bombing would force North Vietnam into abandoning the south insurgency. They believed that North Vietnam would rather face defeat than suffer utter destruction. After the air strikes started, there was no going back for the United States. They were in the war for good.

A two phase plan was proposed which involved two different sequences of bombing. The US did so because of the threat to the south and danger the military would be in. After the February attack on the army barracks at Pleiku, which killed a handful of soldiers, Johnson ordered retaliation against the north. Shortly after, a program called Rolling Thunder started which consisted of "gradually intensified" air strikes. The United States also began using Napalm because they believed that it would intensify the destruction. During Rolling thunder, they air strikes also attacked targets without getting previous authorization.

American leaders claimed that the massive bombings were justifying the attack at Pleiku, and the strong aggression of the North Vietnamese. They claimed that the excessive bombing was necessary to the safety of American soldiers and the South Vietnamese. Johnson made a speech claiming that he could no longer ask the soldiers to "fight with one are behind their backs" (Herring 153). The American leaders claimed that all of these were the cause of the massive air strikes, rather than the United States' desperate attempt to keep the situation in South Vietnam from deteriorating.

At this point, many other things were happening. Many civilians were against the events that were plaguing their nation. Anti-war movements were becoming popular at many campuses, and a protest which 20,000 people attended in Washington. The situation abroad was also deteriorating. Many of the US allies were beginning to plead with the US to stop the unnecessary bombings that plagued Vietnam. Many American leaders had not been completely honest about the situation and in some cases, had taken drastic action when it was not needed. Taking a massive attack such as those of Rolling Thunder changed the nation's view of the situation.

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Rate... **Re: Bombing**by [Paul Slaughterbeck](#) - Thursday, 22 October 2009, 02:46 PM

I agree that the continual bombings changed many American's views of what we were really doing over there. The American leadership seemed to think that the public only cared about American casualties; that they would be happy trading one life here for ten lives there. Were they counting on our collective patriotism, or our collective racism in making this calculation?

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Rate... **Re: Bombing**by [Mikco Stiner](#) - Wednesday, 21 October 2009, 09:19 PM

The air bombings were thought to be a way to end the war quickly with Few American casualties. It was thought that "destroying the enemies war making capacity would force the enemy to come to terms" Herring pg 173. In reality it did just the opposite. "It gave Hanoi time to construct an air defense system, protect it's vital resources, and develop alternative modes of transportation" Herringpg.174 In a sense it did nothing to help the war only make things worse, more people died, more money was spent, and the enemy got stronger. Anti

war rallies and protesters marched, although opinion polls showed that many Americans found the antiwar movement to be more annoying than the war itself. "The antiwar protests remains one of the most controversial issues raised by the war" Herring pg.208 By the summer of 1967 support of the war started to drop and draft calls were rising as was the cost of the long drawn out war. The President had pride that was keeping him from withdrawing from the war. "He chose to stay on course in 1967 for the same reasons he had gone to war in the first place-because he saw no alternative that did not require him to admit failure or defeat". Herring pg.223

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Re: Bombing

by [Tiffany Adrian](#) - Thursday, 22 October 2009, 04:15 PM

It is amazing that the air raids and bombings were thought to be an easy and inexpensive way to the win the war in Vietnam. In some ways the bombing greatly changed the outcome of the war, that lead to the failure for the United States. With the implementation of "Rolling Thunder" more ground troops were brought in by the tens of thousands because of "the support" of these massive raids. Which in turn, caused more U.S. ground troops to loose their lives, adding to the lose of the military airman acting in the raids. I can't imagine how the Johnson administration thought that bombing and air raids would be in our best interest. I wonder if they stopped to think that while bombing might lower the U.S.'s military casualties that it would in turn escalate the numbers of innocent civilian casualties that lost their lives while in the path of these air raids and bombings. McNamara privately conceded that the civilian casualties was as high as 1,000 per month during periods of intensive bombing(Herring 174.) What is to be said about the lose of innocent lives that we put a price on innocent life, because in the end it benefit's us financially?

Because of the bombing raids it did give the Vietnamese time to reconstruct different methods including the building of their elaborate tunneling systems that became quite effective towards the U.S.'s bombing efforts. "We arrived in Xom Moi about four in the morning to wait for the American's. Just before dawn they started to shell us but we hid in our tunnels. As soon as the shelling stopped we moved into our fighting trenches." (Tran Thi Gung, Appy's Patriot's pg. 14.)

The bombing also created a need for sophisticated military equipment that the Soviet's could provide. (Herring 176.) The aid of the Soviet Union added to successfully countering the U.S. air raids. The aid of both the Soviet Union and China played a huge role in helping defeat the U.S. military ground troops, bombings, and air raids. In the end it seems that the bombing turned out to be the demise of America in the Vietnam War.

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Re: Bombing

by [Kayla Wilcox](#) - Wednesday, 21 October 2009, 09:13 PM

U.S. Leaders hoped that the bombings would save money, minimize the number of U.S. casualties, and end the war quickly. Bombing would "offer a quick and comparatively easy solution to a complex problem" (America's Longest War, pg. 173). The three components of the American leadership's hopes are intertwined but in the end the bombings did nothing but push the VC to fight more and harder. The bombings typically focused on "military bases, supply depots, and infiltration routes...", (ALW, pg. 173). The Vietnamese had an abundance of expendable resources and so replenishing supplies after a strike wasn't too difficult. We wanted to save money and bring home as many of our troops as possible. Airstrikes made sense in that they were quicker and needed less man power than fighting on the ground. If counting bodies was the indicator of success then the more bombs that were dropped, the better the odds were of destroying the enemy. "The sheer destructiveness of combat made it...impossible to distinguish between guerrillas and noncombatants." According to Philip Caputo "If it's dead and Vietnamese, it's VC, was a rule of thumb in the bush." (ALW pg. 187) The bombings did nothing more then create mass destruction and fueled the enemy to get stronger. Instead of ending the war, it may have contributed to the length of it. "American officials later tallied as many as 2,000 attempts to initiate peace talks between 1965 and 1967. Neither side could afford to appear indifferent to

such efforts, but neither was willing to make the concessions necessary to bring about negotiations," (ALW, pg. 201). The impact that the actions on both sides had was ultimately costly (both financially and in terms of casualties) and contributed to the length of the war.

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Re: Bombing

by [Mikco Stiner](#) - Wednesday, 21 October 2009, 09:49 PM

I do agree that the bombings may have contributed to the length of the war. What doesn't make sense to me is that if we wanted to save money and bring our troops home why did we do it? The Herring book says that the cost of a B52's bombing mission was up to \$30,000, just for one mission. Between 65 and 68 we lost 950 aircraft which was \$6 billion, and for each \$1 of damage inflicted on N. Vietnam we spent \$9.60. We went from about 35,000 soldiers in 1965 to an estimated 90,000 by 1967. Their plan totally backfired. To me it did just the opposite of what they said they had intended it to. I wonder how many of those 90,000 troops wanted to be there or were drafted? And by 1967 13,000 of our troops had died, I wonder how many of them chose to go? I think it's great for people to risk their lives for our country if thats what they have chosen for themselves, I know somebody has to do it. I have two brothers in Afghanistan right now.

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Re: Bombing

by [Kayla Wilcox](#) - Friday, 23 October 2009, 03:56 PM

I think that you're absolutely right. Why didn't we bring our troops home? And if we wanted to save money bombing wouldn't have been the way to go. If we would have figured out the fact that it wasn't cost effective or a good use of man power and resources to bomb, then maybe we could have cut out a lot of the headache. As you said, "for each \$1 of damage...we spent \$9.60." If we only bombed once or twice maybe it wouldn't have been too much of a loss (although a loss nonetheless), but after repeated bombings it adds up really fast. I also have to wonder how many of our soldiers (drafted or otherwise) knew why they were fighting? There were not any real clear objectives. It would be interesting to find out how many of our troops were drafted and how many chose to fight. I am still grateful for the sacrifice of the troops (then and now). I believe that some things needed to change but hindsight is 20/20, and we should and need to learn from past mistakes and victories. No situation is exactly the same but there are things that can be gleaned from each experience (both good and bad).

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Re: Bombing

by [Paul Slaughterbeck](#) - Thursday, 22 October 2009, 10:31 AM

As you say, America was not willing to make the necessary concessions to achieve peace at the negotiating table. When they seemed to be the closest (with the Marigold initiative) they bombed so close to Hanoi that N. Vietnam was forced from the table. What is made clear to me throughout the various readings is that Johnson wanted no compromise; he wasn't made of "that stuff". He was a proud, even insecure man, who saw any such diplomatic action as weakness. He lacked the flexibility and wisdom needed to get us out of Vietnam.

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**Re: Bombing**by [Tiffany Adrian](#) - Thursday, 22 October 2009, 05:08 PM

The "lose" of Vietnam would produce an even more explosive upheaval Lyndon Johnson commented "mean and destructive debate that would shatter my presidency, kill my administration, and damage our Democracy" (Herring136.)

I absolutely agree that Johnson wanted no compromise. Johnson to me had more of selfish and egotistical motives in the end. "Johnson had made Vietnam a touchstone for his presidency and he could not bear the prospect of failure" (Herring138.) The legislative program "The Great Society," seemed to play a big role in why the Johnson administration didn't retreat from Vietnam sooner. Maybe this contributed to Johnson not questioning McNamara's conclusions about what happened in the Tonkin Gulf. Authorizing one of the first air strikes against the North Vietnamese torpedo boats, "even if now the basis of the information now appears to suspect" (Herring143.)

Johnson's tactics directly reflected his determination in keeping the American public unaware of the escalating war in Vietnam to keep in place his policy of "The Great Society." Maybe if Johnson didn't have his own agendas and selfish motives America's involvement would be historically different.

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**Re: Bombing**by [Jeffrey Harmon](#) - Friday, 23 October 2009, 10:33 AM

American leaders were hoping to end the war quickly with the heavy bombings. They tried to show the muscle, and it backfired. They wanted to maintain their international credibility and would do everything it could so the world thought we were helping a struggling country. Leaders thought heavy bombing would destroy their will to fight. I feel Johnson wanted out but to deaf ears as we could not back down from a little country to show all the big ones we cannot defend ourselves. Neither side would back down, or seemed indifferent, but neither would bring concessions to bring negotiations. (ALW pg. 201) I am sure both sides would do it different if done again. With all the help the north had from china and USSR made it impossible. The anti-war movement was getting huge, and that effected how things were handled at home.

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**Re: Bombing**by [Paul Slaughterbeek](#) - Friday, 23 October 2009, 12:36 PM

It is true that the anti-war movement in America had some huge repercussions. I wonder if the movement at home, especially the actions of the more extreme "doves", actually caused a man as proud as Johnson to "set his jaw"? Because of his inflexibility and the fact that he seemed to take so many things so personally, this movement had no chance of swaying him, and, of course, he was the one calling the shots. This is one reason, I believe, that it is pointed out in ALW that the anti-war movement was controversial, as Mikco stated earlier.

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**Re: Bombing**by [Jeffrey Harmon](#) - Friday, 23 October 2009, 02:47 PM

Yes, I believe the anti-war movement had a lot to do with the war escalation. People sometimes think they are helping, when in fact they are causing a lot of damage. Last week when we read about Jane Fonda and others going to the north and saying hold on we are winning the war at home are traitors to me.

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**Re: Bombing**by [Tiffany Adrian](#) - Friday, 23 October 2009, 09:19 PM

I do believe in some ways that the anti-war movement escalated the war in Vietnam, but for the most part we didn't even know what our cause was for being over there. We do have to remember that some of the first anti-war movements towards our involvement in Vietnam began in 1945 when Merchant Marines after WWII began to protest against the use of their ships to transport French troops to Vietnam.

Americans were kept in the dark for awhile about what the United States real involvement was in the Vietnam War. "Johnson carefully and skillfully silenced the public discussion and obscured the significance in what he was doing" (Herring, 149.) The "Hawks" and the "Doves," at the time had their own different agendas towards the war, but even though they had different views Johnson made the "hawks and "doves" believe that he had both their interests in mind. "By deceit and obfuscation, he brilliantly mobilized a consensus behind his policies while blurring what these policies actually were" (Herring 149.) In the end, did the anti-activists escalate the war? It is hard to say, because Johnson had his own agenda. Who knows if the outcome would have been any different if we didn't have anti-war activists fighting for their cause, as Paul said " he was the one who was calling the shots."

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