

# Kissinger Watch

issue #11 ..... 20 November, 2002

## About This Issue

Dear readers,

In the last few months we have been consulting with lawyers and human rights activists in several countries to assess possibilities of legal action against Henry Kissinger by invoking national legislation (through universal jurisdiction). Notwithstanding the fact that the avenue towards justice for the victims of Kissinger's multiple crimes is strewn with obstacles, we strongly believe it is worthwhile pursuing this route. If you feel you can contribute in any way to this goal, please let us know.

In the meantime, we continue to illuminate Kissinger's multifarious record. In this issue, we focus on Indochina with articles by Ben Kiernan, Director of Yale University's Genocide Studies Program, and Laos expert and investigative journalist Fred Branfman.

Branfman highlights the most heavily bombed country on earth. More bombs were dropped on Laos than on Germany and Japan combined during World War II (article 1). Apart from the direct casualties - presumably several hundred thousand people killed - in the last twenty years remnants of US cluster bombs have killed more than 11,000 Laotian civilians.

Kiernan, the author of an authoritative journal article on the Cambodia bombings and its implications for Cambodian society ("The American Bombardment of Kampuchea, 1969 - 1973," Vietnam Generation, 1, 1, Winter 1989, pp. 4-41), contrasts and compares today's warfare with the bombings three decades ago (article 2).

Kiernan's and other research point to the conclusion that the bombings led to the partial destruction of the fabric of Cambodian society which paved the way for the seizure of power by the genocidal Khmer Rouge.

In our first issue we published a summary of a legal

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## 1. Henry Kissinger: Enlightened Statesman or Odious Schlumpf?

by Fred Branfman (a considerably different version of the article was published on [www.salon.com](http://www.salon.com) )

*A REVIEW OF:*

(1) "The Trial Of Henry Kissinger," by Christopher Hitchens (Verso, release date May 10, 2001, 159 pages); and

(2) "Does America Need A Foreign Policy?: Towards A Diplomacy for the 21st Century", by Henry Kissinger (Simon and Schuster, release date June 14, 2001, 288 pages.)

*"It is the lack of (Albert Speer's) psychological and spiritual ballast and the ease with which he handles the terrifying technical and organizational machinery of our age which make this slight type go extremely far nowadays. This is their age; the Hitlers and Himmlers we may get rid of, but the Speers, whatever happens to this particular special man, will long be with us."*

— London Observer, April 9, 1944

*"The attack of bombardment, by whatever means, of towns, villages, dwellings, or buildings which are undefended is prohibited."*

— Article 25, The Hague Convention, 1907

As we begin a consideration of Henry Kissinger and what his story tells us about ourselves, it is important to note that he is not classically evil. He deserves credit for managing America's opening to China. He reportedly tutors a class in Harlem, cares for his wife and children, and enjoys the esteem of many decent people. And one can feel tremendous sympathy for this refugee from Nazi Germany, whose traumatic early experiences led him to cut off feeling in order to survive. Indeed, it is precisely because Kissinger is not a cardboard figure that it is important to understand his responsibility for mass murder in Indochina, and what it means that our society has honored and not punished him for his actions. It is important not to strip him of his humanity,

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*Enlightened or Odious —continued from page 1*

despite his having done so to so many millions, if we are to understand what his life means for the rest of us.

Several times a month, as I shave, I find myself looking deeply into my eyes - and remembering theirs. It took a lot to create the look in the eyes of the hundreds of peasants from the Plain of Jars in Laos whom I interviewed between September 1969 and February 1971, victims of the most sustained and unprovoked bombardment of innocent civilians in all human history. Seven hundred years of civilization were required to create the depth of warmth, humanity and love that I saw in those eyes. But it took only a few years, particularly 1969 during which Richard Nixon

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*About—continued from page 1*

assessment of Kissinger's command responsibility with respect to the bombings of Cambodia and Laos. That assessment is available on our website ([www.icaonline.org/xp\\_resources/barrett.pdf](http://www.icaonline.org/xp_resources/barrett.pdf)) and has been downloaded several hundred times since March 2002.

As well as showing which files are most downloaded, the statistics of our website tell us that thus far we have had more than 100,000 hits from over 60 different countries. Thanks for your continuing interest and support.

Last but not least and as promised we provide information on how to obtain the film "The Trials of Henry Kissinger" (article 3).

Thanks for your readership

Michael Schmitt  
The International Campaign against Impunity  
[michael@icaonline.org](mailto:michael@icaonline.org)

John M. Miller  
East Timor Action Network  
[fbp@igc.org](mailto:fbp@igc.org)

Gérman Westphal  
Instituto Cono Sur  
[westphal@umbc.edu](mailto:westphal@umbc.edu)

### **Kissinger Watch**

[www.icaonline.org/kissingerwatch](http://www.icaonline.org/kissingerwatch)  
a joint project of:

East-Timor Action Network  
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International Campaign against Impunity  
([www.icaonline.org](http://www.icaonline.org))

Instituto Cono Sur  
(<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/politicaconosur/>)

and Henry Kissinger obliterated everything they owned and loved, to produce the lost, haunted, broken look that was also so noticeable in their gaze.

They had names, these people: Thao, Bounphet, Khamphong, Loung. They had treasured wives and husbands, children and grandparents, buffaloes and homes, rice fields and temples. And they had dreams. Young people dreamed of being married. Young adults of having children. Older people of having grandkids. They were, in short, people just like us who enjoyed the same rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

It was a wrenching experience to hear these kind, decent human beings describe the extermination of revered grandmothers, burned alive by napalm before their eyes; weep as they remembered seeing a beloved three-year old daughter riddled by anti-personnel bombs; or draw into themselves as they spoke of a mother or father buried alive by a 500-pound bomb. One went numb seeing a young boy missing a leg or a young girl with napalm wounds on her breast, stomach and vagina.

It was anguishing to hear them describe what it felt like to lose everything they had to bombers that had come from a distant land they knew nothing about, and against whom they had committed no offense. And it was maddening to realize that U.S. bombing was mainly aimed at such civilians, who were forced to stay near their villages, while mobile guerrilla soldiers escaped as they moved through the heavily forested areas which covered most of northern Laos.

And these refugees were the lucky ones. Though traumatized, they had escaped alive. The most excruciating aspect of interviewing these people was knowing that Nixon and Kissinger were continuing to bomb millions of other innocent Indochinese peasants, many of whom though now alive would be murdered within the days or weeks to come.

It was not known at the time precisely what had happened or why. It is known today. Although Nixon and Kissinger were forced by domestic opinion to withdraw U.S. ground troops, they decided to expand indiscriminate U.S. bombing of Indochina in an effort to prop up local regimes and save American face. Although 2.74 million tons of bombs were dropped on Indochina by Johnson, McNamera and Clark Clifford, most in North and South Vietnam, 3.98 million tons were dropped by Kissinger under Nixon and later Ford, as they vastly increased the bombing of Laos and expanded it into Cambodia.

Kissinger's bombing equaled twice the tonnage dropped on all of Europe and the entire Pacific theater in World War II. Johnson waged five years of war in Indochina. Kissinger waged six and a half years of the most indiscriminate bombing of civilian targets in history, as 20,503 Americans and more than 1 million Indochinese perished, 2 million were wounded, and three million were made homeless.

This expansion in the bombing was not needed to protect Americans, as is often claimed. The North Vietnamese were happy to see Americans withdraw, and would have

escorted them out with welcome wagons. And Kissinger kept bombing, killing and maiming even after it was obvious that no reasonable military objective could be achieved. When Frances Fitzgerald and I conducted a February 1975 briefing in Washington for top Vietnam hands after interviewing recent North Vietnamese victims of bombing, included a 12 year old boy who had been blinded, true believer Frank Scottin objected that Kissinger was only trying to preserve democracy in Southeast Asia. "Oh Frank, cut it out!," objected James Lowenstein, a top aide on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, "you know that Kissinger's only concern is ensuring that he won't be blamed for the inevitable fall of Indochina." Saigon fell two months later.

As I also discovered in a direct investigation of the U.S. bombing in Cambodia, no steps were taken to ascertain if targets being bombed were in fact legitimate military targets.

I spent a day in the spring of 1973 flying over an area which the U.S. Embassy estimated was inhabited by two million Cambodians living under the Khmer Rouge without seeing a single sign of life. My CIA-contract pilot told me the people were hiding from the bombs, particularly the B-52s which indiscriminately obliterated areas the size of football fields from 30,000 feet. I used the pilot's radio to listen in on raids and discovered that pilots bombing neither knew nor checked with anyone to discover if their were civilians in the area. And I was later informed by the U.S. Air force "bombing officer" at 7th Air force Headquarters, whom U.S. spokesman claimed was responsible for ensuring that no civilians were bombed, that he only checked to see that no CIA teams were present in areas under bombardment and had no idea if civilians were in the area.

It is Henry Kissinger's direct involvement in the murder of countless innocent Indochinese civilians from the air, in direct violation of international law recognized by the U.S., which comprises the strongest case for his prosecution as a war criminal in the new book by Christopher Hitchens, *The Trial of Henry Kissinger* (Verso Press). (Full disclosure: Hitchens interviewed me for his book.)

Hitchens does not confine himself to the bombing of Indochina. His case also includes Kissinger's support for, and encouragement of, murder and torture by the Pakistani regime which killed between 500,000 and 3 million Bangladeshis in 1974, the junta which murdered and tortured tens of thousands in Chile, the Greek regime which murdered tens of thousands in the course of overthrowing Archbishop Makarios in Cyprus, and the Indonesian generals who killed 200,000 civilians in East Timor.

Each of these latter cases validates Hitchens' dedication of his book to Joseph Heller, from whose book *Good As Gold* he quotes: "For Joseph Heller, who saw it early and saw it whole: `in Gold's conservative opinion, Kissinger would not be recalled in history as a Bismarck, Metternich or Castlereagh but as an odious schlump who made war gladly.'"

There is no question that Kissinger's support for brutal Kissinger Watch.....

regimes around the world which remained in power through the use of torture and mass murder is indeed contemptible, betrayed fundamental American values, and will stain his name for many years to come. It might be difficult to indict Kissinger as a war criminal for these actions, however, since others did the actual killing. But in the case of Indochina he was directly involved. As Hitchens summarizes the existing evidence, which is not seriously disputed, "it is impossible for him to claim that he was unaware of the consequences of the bombings of Cambodia and Laos; he knew more about them, and in more intimate detail, than any other individual."

The question of whether Henry Kissinger is guilty of mass murder of civilians under international law is thus not open to serious doubt. Was there justice in this world or the next, he would suffer the same fate as those found guilty at Nuremberg. The language of the law, such as the 1907 Hague convention, is unambiguous. And there is no question that he conducted the most sustained bombing of "towns, villages, dwellings, or buildings which (were) undefended" in history.

Not surprisingly, Kissinger shares few of Hitchens' concerns in his new book. Billing itself as "a diplomacy for the 21st century", the book is concerned with the future and not the messy past. He barely refers to Indochina, entirely ignores Chile, East Timor or Bangladesh, and manages to discuss the importance of Iran without even mentioning his historic misjudgment in making the Shah one of the linchpins of the "Nixon Doctrine" - and thereby ensuring generations of hatred and untold troubles for the U.S. and its allies in the Mideast.

Despite their wide differences, however, Kissinger and Hitchens do have one shared concern: the extent to which jurists in one nation have "international jurisdiction" over officials who have committed human rights violations in another. Hitchens taped Kissinger publisher Michael Korda's end of a conversation with the former Secretary of State on the day that the news broke that former Chilean head of state Augusto Pinochet was detained in London. "Henry, this is totally outrageous ... This is a Spanish judge appealing to an English Court about a Chilean head of state," Korda stated. Hitchens concludes that "one must credit Kissinger with grasping what so many other people did not: that if the Pinochet precedent became established, then he himself was in some danger."

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Kissinger inadvertently supports Hitchens' conclusion by devoting far more passion and almost as much space (9 pages) to the question of "international jurisdiction" than he does to THE ENTIRE CONTINENT OF AFRICA.

"The world should think twice about the implications of a procedure by which a single judge is able ... to assert jurisdiction over a citizen of another state for alleged crimes committed entirely in that other state ... without regard to the conciliation procedures that might exist in the country of the accused for dealing with the issue," Kissinger writes.

Kissinger would of course be in serious trouble if the world did "think twice" about the "conciliation procedures" that exist in the United States for dealing with his responsibility for the mass murder of civilians in Indochina. For not only do no procedures exist for bringing him to justice, but he is feted and lionized by the highest sectors of American society, media and business. Kissinger, as Hitchens notes, is paid \$25-30,000 a speech; has become a wealthy man through a consulting company which caters to top American corporations; is published regularly by the Washington Post, Newsweek and Simon and Schuster (his latest book is a Book of the Month Club alternate selection); is fawningly interviewed on television; and is a fixture in high society.

Although it is devoutly to be hoped for, in short, the prospects of Kissinger being tried as a war criminal seem slight at this writing. It is important to note what this tells

us about the state of America as it begins the 21st century.

To begin with, only a nation in deep spiritual and psychological decline could honor a man with as much blood on his hands as Henry Kissinger. But it is not liberals or hippies who initiated this decline. The loss of "family values" is rooted in the realization by millions of draft-age Americans, now parents and grandparents themselves, that their parent's generation was prepared to see them die in Indochina. This realization was first held by young Americans who opposed the war, but eventually spread to disillusioned GIs. An entire generation was plunged into a moral abyss from which it has yet to emerge.

Equally is the general desensitization to human life experienced in every sector of society. Vietnam is not solely responsible for this. But our refusal to openly discuss our responsibility for murder in Indochina, let alone provide reparations to the survivors, has seen us lose a critical opportunity to teach our children that America is a nation that values human life. It is not necessary, however desirable, to say we were wrong in intervening in Indochina. Nor must we necessarily acknowledge the truth: that we were responsible for the vast majority of casualties.

But we refuse at our peril to at least take responsibility for the casualties we did cause, and seek to make amends to those who survived our brutality. The Germans did so after World War II, not for the Jews but for themselves. Our failure to do so harms our society no less than that of the

## Kissinger Protested in Westchester

On Saturday, October 26, more than 15 people gathered in Dobbs Ferry, north of New York City, to protest a speech by Henry Kissinger at the Masters School.

A majority of the passing motorists (most going to Kissinger's speech at the school) honked their horns or thumbs up to the demonstrators who wore Henry Kissinger masks and raised hands soaked in red paint. Many parents of the students, who were required to attend, were supportive. One parent said when his son asked him who Henry Kissinger was, he replied "a war criminal."

Kissinger was speaking at the 125th anniversary of the school. His wife is a former student and current trustee of the elite private school. The talk was not open to the public and he took no questions. The protest, sponsored by the East Timor Action Network/NY and Casa Westchester, was covered by local and student newspapers and by WBAI, New York City's main alternative radio station.

— John M. Miller, Special to Kissinger Watch



Indochinese.

Kissinger's new book also reveals the central problem facing America today: the rise of a technocratic, unfeeling, but skilled class of baby-boomers who are have ascended to the heights of power as the new century begins. Kissinger presents himself as an enlightened statesman selflessly pursuing the national interest in the face of small-minded men consumed with partisan politics, narrow ambition, or ideologies of left or right. "For American foreign policy, the need (is) for ideological subtlety and long-range strategy ... unfortunately, domestic politics is driving American foreign policy in the opposite direction," he writes.

And what is the "long-range strategy" and "ideological subtlety" required? Kissinger never presents it. The book is essentially a travelogue, as he proceeds region by region around the world, supporting missile defense here and sanctions against Saddam Hussein there, peppered with countless observations of stupefying banality, e.g. "eighth, world order - or Asian order - cannot emerge from a strategy of equilibrium alone but neither can it be achieved without it."

Even more striking than what he says, however, is what he ignores. America's top foreign policy imperative for the coming century is clearly to lead an international effort to save a biosphere now terminally threatened by a combination of global warming, biodiversity loss, water depletion and pollution, and a host of other environmental ills. Even war itself pales before the "long-term" consequences of our continued degradation of the biosphere.

And what does Dr. Kissinger have to say about this? On page 149, we read: "Then there is the entire range of New Age issues: proliferation, environmental, cultural and scholarly exchange, among many others."

Yes, the ONLY reference to humanity's biospheric crisis in a book purportedly presenting a strategic foreign policy vision for the 21st century is a one-word reference to the "environment", lumped together with "cultural and scholarly exchange", and dismissed as a "New Age" issue along with nuclear, chemical and biological "proliferation" which threatens far more people than the prospect of world or even regional wars.

This mixture of ahumanity and banality reveals the truth of the prediction made by the London Observer more than 50 years ago. What is most striking about Kissinger is his amorality not immorality, the emptiness not evil in his thinking.

In the past we had most to fear from religious or political ideologues. Today it is the non-ideologues, the "slight types" who quietly run our government and dominate our age. It is the Richard Cheneys and Andrew Cards who withdraw from the Kyoto Treaty on global warming and cut spending on conservation, the Donald Rumsfields who lead the charge for Missile Defense, the Lawrence Lindseys who promote over a trillion in tax cuts that are urgently needed to save the biosphere, the Colin Powells and Condolezza Rices who, though personally decent, manage a foreign policy that ignores the pain of billions

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who work like animals merely to survive.

Henry Kissinger, through an unparalleled talent for bureaucratic intrigue and media manipulation, is the first of these types to demonstrate the ability to manage the Information Age "machinery" of our age. But he will not be the last.

The Reagans, Nixons and George W. Bushes we will be rid of. But the Kissingers, whatever happens to this particular special man, will long be with us.

## 2. 'Collateral damage' means real people

*Bangkok Post, Sunday October 20, 2002*

*Ben Kiernan is A. Whitney Griswold Professor of History and Director of the Genocide Studies Program at Yale University, and author of The Pol Pot Regime (Yale University Press, 2nd edition, 2002).*

When US bombs hit a civilian warehouse in Afghanistan last year, US Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld responded: "We're not running out of targets, Afghanistan is." There was laughter in the press gallery.

The bombs continued to fall. We now know that Rumsfeld urges using "the force necessary to prevail, plus some" and rejects "promising ... not to permit collateral damage." Civilian casualties, then, are predictable.

By March 2002, the first six months of US bombing in Afghanistan had killed possibly as many civilians as had been massacred by al-Qaeda's genocidal attack on the World Trade Center in New York. The deadly toll has continued to rise, documented by the New York Times. The paper reported on 18 May: "Residents of eastern Afghanistan have repeatedly complained of American air attacks that they say have killed civilians." Over the next two days the Times reported on a May 16 incident, after which "American officials said that nine Afghan men who were killed in an American air raid there may have been local tribesman, not hostile fighters," and another tragedy on May 12 in which five villagers died when American Special Forces troops raided a "small farming village."

On May 27 the paper reported a similar incident four days earlier: "An airborne assault on this village by United States-led troops three nights ago has raised fury among villagers, who say soldiers shot several people, killed the headman of the village and caused a 3-year-old girl to flee and fall to her death down a well."

On June 3, the paper reported that "local officials have repeatedly complained of innocent Afghans being killed in the raids," and a month later, that "the Afghan government expressed dismay today at reports that about 140 civilians were killed or wounded in an American-led operation in southern Afghanistan on Monday." The newspaper reported from Kabul on July 7 that the attack had caused 40 deaths, including 25 members of one family, adding: "This is not the first instance of civilian casualties during the American military campaign in Afghanistan. American airstrikes have hit other civilian areas, including wedding parties, and have been accused by local villagers of causing several hundred deaths."

Twice last August, “the Americans opened fire on Afghans in the Asadabad area, killing five men... The victims turned out to be relatives of a local tribal chief with past Taliban connections, but many here say the Americans killed men with no current links to Islamic militants.”

What then would happen during a US attack on Baghdad, a city of five million people? A Times/CBS poll suggests that a minority of Americans will support a US invasion of Iraq if substantial Iraqi civilian casualties result. There are good historical reasons to withhold support for operations causing serious “collateral damage”.

Thirty-three years ago the US Air Force began a secret B-52 bombardment of Cambodia. In 1973, Congress imposed a halt on the campaign. But nearly half of its 540,000 tons of bombs fell in the last six months. The Secretary of the Air Force later said that President Richard Nixon “wanted to send a hundred more B-52’s. This was appalling. You couldn’t even figure out where you were going to put them all...”

The civilian toll was massive. In 1970 a US aerial and

tank attack in Kompong Cham province took 200 lives. In 1971, the town of Angkor Borei was heavily bombed, burnt and levelled by B-52’s and T-28’s. Whole families were trapped in trenches they had dug underneath their homes. 100 people were killed, and 200 houses destroyed.

US intelligence soon discovered that many “training camps” on which its Cambodian allies, the Lon Nol regime, had requested air strikes “were in fact merely political indoctrination sessions held in village halls and pagodas.” Cambodian intelligence noted that “aerial bombardments against the villagers have caused civilian loss on a large scale,” and that the peasant survivors of the US bombing were turning to Pol Pot’s Khmer Rouge communists for support.

One young Khmer joined the communists after an aerial attack killed 50 people in his village. Not far away, bombs fell on O Reang Au market in 1972, killing twenty people, and twice more in 1973, killing another twenty-five, including two Buddhist monks.

When bombs hit Boeng village, according to peasants,

### 3. The Trials of Henry Kissinger A Film by Alex Gibney & Eugene Jarecki

First Run Icarus Films  
718 488-8900  
32 Court St 21st Fl.  
Brooklyn New York  
<http://www.frif.com/new2002/kiss.html>  
mailbox@frif.com

Is Henry Kissinger a war criminal? Featuring previously unseen footage, newly declassified U.S. government documents, and revealing interviews with key insiders from Henry Kissinger’s White House years, this new film examines charges facing the former Secretary of State and Nobel Peace Prize winner.



Focusing on his role in three key events - America’s secret bombing of Cambodia in 1969, the approval of Indonesia’s genocidal assault on East Timor in 1975, and the assassination of a Chilean general in 1970 – THE TRIALS OF HENRY KISSINGER also examines the possibility that Kissinger, by sabotaging the 1969 Paris peace talks to further Nixon’s

candidacy and his own concomitant rise to power, bears responsibility for all the deaths in Vietnam from 1969 to 1975.

To debate the issues, the film brings together Kissinger’s friends, colleagues, and detractors, including Gen. Alexander Haig, Jr., Seymour Hersh, Christopher Kissinger Watch .....

Hitchens, Walter Isaacson, William Safire, Lt. General Brent Scowcroft, and William Shawcross, as well as Vietnam peace talks delegate Daniel Davidson, former U.S. Ambassadors Edward Korry and David Newsom, National Security Council staffer Roger Morris, Human Rights Lawyer Geoffrey Robertson, and Professor of Law Michael Tigar, among others.

Shedding light on a career long shrouded in secrecy, the film explores how a young boy who fled Nazi Germany grew up to become one of the most powerful men in American foreign policy and now, in the autumn of his life, one of its most controversial figures.

“Devastating!”  
- Stephen Holden, New York Times

“An expose of the corrosiveness of power!”  
- David Denby, The New Yorker

“(A) powerfully muckraking film about the accountability of public figures and about how, in regard to international justice, there can be no exceptions.”  
- Peter Rainer, New York Magazine

“Should be required viewing for every American, especially now.”  
-Newsday

- \* 2002 Human Rights Watch International Film Festival (New York)
- \* 2002 Toronto International Film Festival

80 minutes / Color / 2002  
Sale/video: \$440  
Rental/video: \$125

many people were caught in their houses and burnt to death. Nearby Chalong village lost over twenty dead. An inhabitant later recalled:

“Many monasteries were destroyed by bombs. People in our village were furious with the Americans; they did not know why the Americans had bombed them. Seventy people from Chalong joined the fight against Lon Nol after the bombing.”

B-52's scored a direct hit on Trapeang Krapeu village. At least twenty people died. When Anlong Trea was napalmed and bombed, “Over sixty people from this village then joined the Khmer Communist army out of anger at the bombing,” locals recalled.

In March 1973, the US carpet bombardment spread across the whole country. Around Phnom Penh alone, 3,000 civilians were killed in three weeks. UPI reported: “Refugees swarming into the capital from target areas report dozens of villages... have been destroyed and as much as half their population killed or maimed in the current bombing raids.”

The bombardment intensified to 3,600 tons per day. William Shawcross reported in Sideshow: Kissinger, Nixon and the Destruction of Cambodia, that the “wholesale carnage” shocked the chief of the political section in the US Embassy, William Harben. One night, he said, “a mass of peasants” went out on a funeral procession and “walked straight into” a bombing raid. “Hundreds were slaughtered.” Donald Dawson, a young Air Force captain, flew twenty-five B-52 missions but refused to fly again when he heard a Cambodian wedding party had been razed by B-52's. In one village eighty people died when B-52's hit the village and its pagoda in 1973. A nearby village was annihilated; a single family survived.

In 1973, the Khmer Rouge were able to continue recruiting many peasants by highlighting the damage done by US air strikes. The CIA's Directorate of Operations, after investigations in the Southwest Zone, reported on 2 May 1973 that the communists had launched a new recruiting drive:

“They are using damage caused by B-52 strikes as the main theme of their propaganda. The cadre tell the people that the Government of Lon Nol has requested the airstrikes and is responsible for the damage and the ‘suffering of innocent villagers’... The only way to stop ‘the massive destruction of the country’ is to ... defeat Lon Nol and stop the bombing. This approach has resulted in the successful recruitment of a number of young men... Residents ... say that the propaganda campaign has been effective with refugees and in areas... which have been subject to B-52 strikes.”

US B-52's struck Stung Kambot village one morning in February 1973. They killed 50 villagers and wounded thirty. In March, B-52's and F-111's bombarded an ox-cart caravan in the same district, killing ten peasants. One local man recalls that “often people were made angry by the bombing and went to join the revolution.” A peasant youth said B-52's bombed his village three to six times per day for three months, killing over 1,000 people.

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Journalist Bruce Palling asked a Khmer Rouge officer if his forces had made use of the bombing for anti-US propaganda:

Chhit Do: Oh yes, they did. Every time after there had been bombing, they would take the people to see the craters, to see how big and deep the craters were, to see how the earth had been gouged out and scorched...

The ordinary people ... sometimes literally shit in their pants when the big bombs and shells came... Their minds just froze up and they would wander around mute for three or four days. Terrified and half-crazy, the people were ready to believe what they were told... That was what made it so easy for the Khmer Rouge to win the people over... It was because of their dissatisfaction with the bombing that they kept on cooperating with the Khmer Rouge, joining up with the Khmer Rouge, sending their children off to go with them ...

Bruce Palling: So the American bombing was a kind of help to the Khmer Rouge?

Chhit Do: Yes, that's right..., sometimes the bombs fell and hit little children, and their fathers would be all for the Khmer Rouge...

On 3 August 1973, US aircraft bombed the hill village of Plei Loh, home of montagnard tribal people. An American agent reported after a follow-up mission that “the village was totally destroyed, with 28 civilians and five VC guerrillas killed.” The next day, B-52's attacked nearby Plei Lom village, “killing twenty people, including children.” On 10 August, Plei Lom was bombed again, killing 30 montagnards. On the same day B-52's struck nearby Plei Blah village: 50 died. The US army report on this noted that “the Communists intend to use this incident for propaganda purposes.”

Another report to the US Army in July 1973 stated that “the civilian population fears US air attacks far more than they do Communist rocket attacks or scorched-earth tactics.” Up to 150,000 civilian deaths resulted from the US bombing campaigns in Cambodia from 1969 to 1973, before the Khmer Rouge genocide took another 1.7 million lives in 1975-79.

An assault on Iraq, then, may cause not only massive civilian casualties. It could also drive angry Iraqi civilians into the arms of fundamentalist extremists waiting to exploit their misery.

The legacy of a million civilian Vietnamese war dead must also be taken into account. Despite recent attempts to erase public memory of the horror of the Vietnam War, the lessons have not been ignored.

Through the 1980s, according to the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, two-thirds of Americans polled said they considered the Vietnam War “more than a mistake, fundamentally wrong and immoral.”

To prevent a comparable tragedy, this time Americans need to speak out in advance. If it happens anyway, those responsible should be tried for war crimes.