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McCain's Endless Refrain: Bomb, Bomb, Bomb

One-Note John

by BRIAN CLOUGHLEY

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The South Carolina town of Murrells Inlet seems to be a delightful place with good seafood and golf courses and exactly eight years ago it hosted then Presidential hopeful Senator John McCain on one of his optimistic stops around the country. At a meeting of supporters he was asked if military action against Iran was possible, and specifically why the US didn't send "an airmail message to Tehran?"

McCain took the microphone and in a YouTube recording is seen and heard saying "You know that song, 'Bomb Iran' . . . that old, eh, [singing] song . . . bomb, bomb, bomb . . ." in a crass performance that reminded some people about the Senator's background.

The background is that Senator McCain is a bomber from way back, and as recently-appointed Chairman of the powerful Senate Armed Services Committee he is now in a position to encourage yet more U.S. confrontation —and bombing — around the world.

On March 19 McCain's committee joined its saber-rattling Foreign Relations colleagues to write to Secretary of Defense Ash Carter and Secretary of State John Kerry "concerning Chinese

maritime strategy and the alarming scope and pace of land reclamation now being conducted by the People's Republic of China in the South China Sea.”

Highlights of the letter include their conceited assumption that the U.S. has the right to dictate to other nations and their remarkable perversion of historical record.

The Committees pronounced that “For the international community to continue benefiting from the rules-based international order that has brought stability and prosperity to the Indo-Pacific region for the last seven decades, the United States must work together with like-minded partners and allies to develop and employ a strategy that aims to shape China’s coercive peacetime behavior” which might appear to be simply a piece of routine arrogance. It was offensive to China, of course, but it seems mandatory for every U.S. politician and star-rank military officer to disparage and insult Russia or China or preferably both when delivering a speech or giving an interview.

It wasn’t the insult that was mind-catching, however : it was the flat statement that in the last seventy years there has been a “rules-based international order that has brought stability and prosperity to the Indo-Pacific region.” The Committees ignored the fact that there was a decade of US-inspired havoc and slaughter in and around Vietnam in that period. They don’t admit that America’s war brought insecurity, poverty, horror and death to millions of innocent people. The Vietnam war was not “rules-based” — on either side — and the rest of the world continues to be horrified by the needless catastrophe.

As recounted in the UK’s *Guardian* newspaper in January 2015 “It is 50 years since the first US combat troops entered Vietnam in March 1965. During that notorious conflict, the US dropped more than 270 million bombs in Laos as part of a CIA-run, top-secret operation . . . One-third of the bombs failed to explode on impact and have since claimed an average of 500 victims a year, mainly children and farmers forced to work on their contaminated fields to sustain their families. Despite tens of millions of dollars spent, only 1% of Laos territory has been cleared so far.” That is not exactly “stability and prosperity” in a region that is still suffering from the relentless bombing that killed and maimed countless thousands of totally innocent people.

The barbaric carnage and its aftermath of dreadful suffering were not confined to Laos. Operation Rolling Thunder was a three year program of blitzing North Vietnam with the intention of wreaking such havoc that it would cease its fight to reunite with the South in one nation. US aircraft dropped 643,000 tons of bombs that killed at least 100,000 people. This was international brigandage on a massive scale and hardly an example of what the Senate Committees call a “rules-based international order.”

Although the Senate Committees are trying to ignore and even erase all memory of the Vietnam-era carnage it would be difficult for them to deny that the terror bombing campaign was a military failure and that one of those involved in it was Senator McCain, the leader of the anti-China lobby and supporter of international law who was shot down while attacking a power station in Hanoi in October 1967 on his 23rd airstrike. (The U.S. lost over 900 aircraft in its onslaught.) He behave honourably and indeed gallantly during his almost six years of captivity

in horrible circumstances, but how many non-combatants did he kill when he dropped bombs on North Vietnam twenty-three times?

The CIA estimated that 72,000 civilians were killed by US bombing in Rolling Thunder. Can the Senator claim that his bombing raids on Hanoi were consistent with “respect for international law” which he advocates so zealously in his letter rebuking China for allegedly infringing it?

There might be a tiny whiff of humbug detectable in this self-important stage-grabber who supported the bombing of Libya that has resulted in the country crashing into anarchy. In April 2011 he proposed that Washington should increase the use of ground attack aircraft against Libya, saying “It is still incredibly puzzling to me that the two most accurate [USAF] close air support weapons systems, the A-10 and the AC-130, have been taken out of the fight,” and six months later told the Senate that “we are engaged in Libya, and we are succeeding.” Certainly the US-NATO attacks destroyed much of Libya’s infrastructure (shades of North Vietnam), but their “respect for international law” was dubious, to say the least. There was no stopping the Hero of Hanoi, however, and the next prospective bombing targets that attracted his approval were in Syria.

In March 2012 he told the Senate that the Syrian government was involved in slaughter of innocent lives, which was as true as the fact that rebel forces were doing the same, but he considered the government should be stopped and “The only realistic way to do so is with foreign airpower.” The man has never found an airstrike suggestion he didn’t like. It’s his solution to world disorder. If there’s a problem : bomb it.

On March 25, according to McCain’s website, he and Senator Lindsey Graham approved of “Saudi Arabia leading an international coalition conducting air strikes against Iranian-backed separatists in Yemen.” They declared that “Saudi Arabia and our Arab partners deserve our support as they seek to restore order in Yemen, which has collapsed into civil war.”

He thinks that bombing Yemen is going to solve everything.

According to Human Rights Watch, airstrikes on March 26 and 27 killed at least 11 civilians in Sanaa, the capital, and another report included the pitiful statement by Mustafa al-Ahmadi, a father of eight, that “We haven’t slept — one child screams and a second cries. Once it’s quiet, we return to our room but the minute we step in, a second explosion rocks the house so we return to the basement. This is how we spend the night, running back and forth.”

Just like the old days in Hanoi.

Remember what Lyndon Johnson said in February 1965: “Bomb, bomb, bomb. That’s all you know. Well, I want to know why there’s nothing else. You generals have all been educated at the expense of the taxpayer, and you’re not giving me any ideas and any solutions for this damn little piss-ant country. Now I don’t need ten generals to come in here ten times and tell me to bomb . . . I want some solutions. I want some answers.”

But answers came there none.