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Van Bao, The aftermath of a B-52 strike on the suburbs of Hai Phong, 1972.

Van Bao was a veteran photographer of the anti-colonial forces in Vietnam, and by the time he took this picture had for decades depicted the struggle against the invaders, first the French, then the Americans. This photograph shows a tiny fragment of the destruction brought by B-52 bombing raids on North Vietnam in 1972. They were meant to delay the imminent collapse of the South Vietnamese regime following the withdrawal of US ground troops, at least until after Nixon's bid for re-election. Nixon, with Kissinger's support, wanted to 'level that goddam country' and to that end unleashed the largest attack in the history of aerial warfare. The B-52 strike is a massive, blunt and indiscriminate weapon. Working amid the devastation, Van Bao and his driver, found no one living in an area of four kilometers.

We see, then, various details of the massacre, most of all the people flung to the ground and partially buried. While the force of the explosions has torn away some of their clothing, we can still see them as individuals in what remains, and in their poses, the way they hold their hands, and their contact with each other. In this way, they may speak back to us. They could not at the time, since such images were excluded from the Western press. Killing from the air still continues, of course, to burnish the warrior-image of another President. The people it is directed against, like those seen here, lack the power to speak to us directly or show us their images. Yet the number of those without cameras and online connections steadily shrinks, so the instrumental calculations of power increasingly collide with the particular power of stories, videos and photographs, leading more of us to ask: why must this person--here, before our eyes—be maimed or murdered for the purposes of foreign policy or public relations?