



Lesson Plan prepared by Dr. Gary Joiner and Ashley Dean, SAC-LSUS, 2018.

Operation LINEBACKER II: Introduction

1.1 Operation LINEBACKER II was the culmination of nine years of military operations and political issues that finally ended American involvement in the Vietnam War.

A. What were the micromanagement issues faced by the U.S. military by the Johnson Administration?

1. Strategy
2. Troop levels
3. Target selection
4. Rules of engagement
5. Shifting desired results

B. What were the political issues immediately prior to LINEBACKER II?

1. North Vietnamese Spring Offensive
2. Drastic American troop drawdown
3. Inconclusive negotiations at the Paris Peace Talks
4. Potential Congressional cutting off funds for the war

C. What were the military components of LINEBACKER II?

1. Strategic Air Command B-52s
2. U.S. Navy carrier borne tactical aircraft
3. U.S. Marine land based and carrier based tactical aircraft
4. Tactical Air Command fighter-bombers.

D. What were the primary targets of the bombings?

1. SAM sites
2. Power generating plants
3. Railroad complexes
4. Military air fields
5. Storage facilities

E. What were the strategic thinking results?

1. World War II formation style strategic bombing formations were unacceptable
2. Nuclear mission training was not compatible with convention bombing.
3. B-52s and TAC aircraft flying at higher altitudes were vulnerable to SAMS
4. Tactics must be changed to conform to the mission.
5. Types of missions must be reconsidered.
6. The numbers of strategic bombers would be reduced due to new weapons
7. Bomber commanders gave way to fighter commanders

1.2 The many causes of this war:

- A. French Indochina War (I)
1. French Colonialism



The French were forced out of Vietnam after 1954 by Vietnamese nationalists. The leader, Ho Chi Minh, had been somewhat pro-Western, but was rejected and turned to Russia and China for aid.

2. Chinese influence
3. Russian influence and weapons
4. Red Scare era of McCarthyism

All communists were thought to be part of a monolithic block.

Political Climate Leading up to LINEBACKER II

2.1 The Strategic Air Command as the Ultimate Strategic Deterrent

A. What was SAC?

1. The primary nuclear deterrence command of the United States
2. Responsible for strategic bombers and land-based ICBMs
3. Responsible for the defense of the of the Continental United States
4. Comprised of the Second Air Force, Eighth Air Force and Fifteenth Air Force

B. What is nuclear deterrence?

Deterrence Theory gained traction throughout the Cold War with regard to nuclear capability. The general idea is that a nuclear force could deter a (possibly) more powerful adversary with the threat of nuclear surprise attack, namely in retaliation to any undesirable action, including a first strike nuclear attack. This strategy intends to dissuade an enemy from taking an action or supporting another enemy's action. One of the foremost deterrence theorists, *Bernard Brodie*, in "Anatomy of Deterrence," explained that a credible nuclear deterrent "**must be always at the ready, yet never used.**"

C. What was SAC's role in Korea?

1. SAC was the only command that could send bombers and fighters to the Far East, but could also send nuclear capable bombers to the United Kingdom as a forward base if the Russians decided to escalate the war.
2. The Korean War placed a tremendous strain on SAC.
3. While supporting United Nations forces in Korea for conventional bombing support, SAC also increased its nuclear-capable units.
4. LeMay did not want to send his bombers to Korea. He suggested that his B-29s should be sent into North Korea and carpet bomb their cities
5. The cardinal mission of SAC remained nuclear and the threat of overwhelming devastation to an enemy anywhere in the world.
6. As intercontinental ballistic missiles entered their infancy, SAC made certain that all delivery vehicles that contained nuclear warheads were under its control.

D. How did Eisenhower's "New Look" affect the U.S. Military?



1. Tremendous increase in strategic deterrence assets under Eisenhower
2. Offensive weapons (bombers)
3. Defensive early warning systems (DEW Line radar system)
4. Dedicated nuclear missile armed fighter-interceptor squadrons
5. Air defense missile systems protecting cities and military bases

E. How did the Kennedy administration view communism in SEA?

Robert McNamara wrote in “We were Wrong, Terribly Wrong,” *Newsweek*, April 16, 1995:

“Throughout the Kennedy Years, we operated on two premises that ultimately proved contradictory. One was that the fall of South Vietnam to Communism would threaten the security of the United States and the Western world. The other was that only the South Vietnamese could defend their nation, and that America should limit its role to providing training and logistical support. In line with that latter view, we actually began planning for the phased withdrawal of U. S. forces in 1963, a step adamantly opposed by those who believed it could lead to the loss of South Vietnam and, very likely, all of Asia.”

The Vietnam Conflict

3.1 Micromanagement: 1964-1972

A. What happened in the Tonkin Gulf?

1. On August 2, 1964, US performing signal intelligence patrol as part of DESOTO operations in the Gulf of Tonkin.
2. Vietnamese torpedoes and machine gun fire attacked the *USS Maddox*. One US aircraft and three Northern Vietnamese torpedo boats were damaged, but The *USS Maddox* suffered only one single bullet hole.
3. The National Security Agency originally claimed that a second incident occurred in the Tonkin Gulf just two days later, on August 4, 1964. During more DESOTO patrols off the coast of North Vietnam, the *USS Maddox* and *Turner Joy* received radar, sonar, and transmissions that they believed signaled another attack. For several hours the United States Navy claimed to fire on and sink two attacking torpedo boats, but no wreckage was ever recovered.
4. In a 2003 interview, United States Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara (1961-1968) admitted that the August 4 incident never happened.



5. Despite the reality of either or both claims, these alleged acts of aggression drew the United States to directly confront the communists in Vietnam.
6. The Tonkin Gulf Incident prompted Congress to approve H.J. RES 1145 (Southeast Asia or Tonkin Gulf Resolution)
7. This resolution granted LBJ the authority to conduct military operations in Southeast Asia without a formal declaration of war.

B. What was the early strategy of LBJ and McNamara? (Body Count)

1. The war quickly escalated from a civil war in South Vietnam with North Vietnam aiding the Viet Cong and the United States aiding South Vietnam, to a direct confrontation between North Vietnam and the United States with the two original combatants playing secondary roles.
2. Between 1964 and 1968 body counts became the primary factor in proving success. McNamara set the bombing pattern.
3. Lyndon Johnson and Robert McNamara forced rules of engagement (ROE) that were at times almost impossible to follow. They created their own targeting lists that were seemingly incomprehensible.
4. Johnson's main aim was to reduce the flow of supplies and men coming south along the jungle supply line called the Ho Chi Minh Trail. McNamara judged success only in one manner – did we kill more of their people than they killed of ours?

C. What is the Ho Chi Minh Trail?

1. Logistical system that ran from North Vietnam to South Vietnam through Laos and Cambodia.
2. Provided support through moving manpower and materiel to the Viet Cong (National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam) and the People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN – North Vietnamese Communists) during the war.
3. The United States National Security Agency dubbed the Ho Chi Minh Trail “one of the greatest achievements of military engineering of the 20th Century.”
4. Because this “trail” was the main logistical stronghold for the communists, it became a main target for strategic bombing and interdiction campaigns.

D. What is the JCS?

1. The JCS (Joint Chiefs of Staff) is a body of senior leaders in the US who advise the POTUS, Secretary of Defense, and Homeland Security Council on military matters.
2. During the Vietnam Conflict, the JCS set the Rules of Engagement (ROE) that the United States Air Force must follow.
3. Often, the unsuccessful earlier years of the conflict are blamed on LBJ, McNamara, and the JCS because of these strict ROE.



4. The USAF wanted a free hand to choose targets and organize operations, but the JCS ultimately made these decisions for them.

E. What was the relationship of the JCS and SAC?

1. During the Vietnam conflict, the relationship between the JCS and SAC was tense at times, but ultimately these two driving forces in the US Gov't worked symbiotically.
2. SAC got almost everything it wanted, unless other priorities diverted some of the funds.

F. How did the conflict in SEA change the primary role of the B-52?

1. Until this point, the B-52's primary role was nuclear readiness and the United States' deterrence force under SAC.
2. In SEA, the B-52 carried out strategic bombing and interdiction campaigns, utilizing conventional bombs, and later, smart bombs.
3. The B-52 was the primary bomber used in the Vietnam Conflict, and played the decisive role in ending America's involvement in the war with Operation LINEBACKER II in 1972.

G. *List Key Players – Johnson, McNamara, LeMay, Westmoreland, LBJ, etc...*

H. See Gary Joiner, PhD and Ashley Dean, *LINEBACKER II* (White Paper), "JCS Working Group Target list (May 1964)," 56.

I. What is Operation ARCLIGHT?

During ARCLIGHT, the USAF deployed B-52Fs from the US and Guam to provide Close Air Support (CAS) to ground operations in Vietnam.

J. What is Operation ROLLING THUNDER?

1. Immediately following Tonkin Gulf attacks, the Commander of the US Pacific Fleet developed a plan for a highly restricted and carefully controlled sustained air campaign designed to gradually escalate in three stages, known as Operation ROLLING THUNDER.
2. This strategic bombing campaign utilized US military aircraft to attack targets in North Vietnam from March 1965 through October 1968.
3. The bombardment aimed to put military pressure on North Vietnam's Communist leaders and reduce their capacity to wage war against the South.
4. Air chiefs relied on the perceived lessons from World War II as a guide for the strategic bombing of Vietnam, as commanders viewed the unrestricted campaigns against Germany and Japan as proper applications of air power. Planning for ROLLING THUNDER drew upon the development of AWPD-1, the plan that guided the Army Air Force's bombing of Germany.

5. ROLLING THUNDER had three main objectives:

-First and foremost, the bombing campaign was to act as strategic persuasion.



-To raise the morale of military and political elites in South Vietnam by showing the ARVN that the United States fully backed their cause.

- Interdiction: Air commanders believed that targeting economic centers would disrupt not only the North's war making capabilities, but unravel their social fabric as well. Main targets included bridges, rail yards and depots, docks, barracks, and supply caches.

K. Was Operation ROLLING THUNDER successful?

1. The idea of a gradual, calculated, and limited escalation of air strikes eased some of the widespread concern that an all-out air campaign would tempt the Chinese or Soviets to intervene.
2. This gradual approach insinuated that the mere threat of destruction would indeed serve as a more influential deterrent than actually carrying out the destruction.
3. The paranoia over the possibility of intercession on the side of the North Vietnamese paired with the disagreement over the possible effectiveness of a more robust air strategy complicated things. Washington leaders attempted to strike an impossible equilibrium: successfully terrorizing the enemy while maintaining a positive image on the world stage.
4. By 1966, the Communist forces possessed a growing arsenal that included anti-aircraft guns, automatic weapons, and Soviet-built SA-2 missiles. The majority of these SAM sites were not hit [during ROLLING THUNDER] because of their close proximity to the Hanoi-Haiphong area and the Chinese border.
5. This realization came too late: airstrikes, whether gradual or massive, simply could not turn the tide. The belief that an air campaign could not win the war added with the fear of a serious military confrontation with communist China, the Soviet Union, or both, left administrators at a loss of how to succeed in Vietnam.
6. The Department of Defense announced that 864,000 tons of American bombs dropped on North Vietnam during ROLLING THUNDER between March 1965 and November 1968, making it the most intense air battle waged during the Cold War period.
7. The mission hindered the movement of supplies, but did not significantly affect the infiltration of enemy troops into the South. 830 US Aircraft were lost.
8. In 1966 alone, the value of aircraft lost on sorties against North Vietnam is estimated at \$480 million. The damage done to North Vietnam was nearly \$300 million, but the total cost for the campaign cost the United States \$900 million.
9. The confusion in Washington, the nature of the war, and the North's anticipation of such an attack limited the operation's success.



Ultimately, ROLLING THUNDER's mission began as strategic persuasion, transformed into tactical interdiction, and ended with Hanoi no closer to the negotiating table.

L. What are some other notable air campaigns of the Vietnam Conflict?

1. MENU
2. COMMANDO HUNT

3.2 Operation LINEBACKER I

A. What is Vietnamization?

1. The "Vietnamization" of the war was a policy of President Richard Nixon to end the US involvement in the Vietnam Conflict by training, equipping, and expanding the Southern Vietnamese forces while reducing the number of US combat troops.
2. Vietnamization came about after the Viet Cong's Tet Offensive in 1968.
3. This was part of Nixon's broader détente- driven foreign policy stance in Vietnam. The US no longer regarded its fundamental strategy as the containment of communism, but as a cooperative world order. US relations with the USSR and China ultimately trumped the conflict in Southern Vietnam.
4. This term ONLY applied to ground combat troop levels.

B. What was the Easter Offensive?

1. In March 1972, the North Vietnamese launched a large-scale offensive.
2. The aim was to inflict a decisive blow against South Vietnam, as America had begun major troop drawdowns by this time.
3. There were three main front of the offensive:
 - i. NVA divisions struck across the DMZ into Quang Tri province on March 30, hoping to capture Hue. Backed by US Airpower, the ARVN successfully defended Hue and eventually recaptures Quang Tri City on September 15, 1972.
 - ii. NV forces assaulted An Loc through Cambodia. An ARVN counteroffensive, combined with American bombing, pushed the NVA out of the city by June 18.
 - iii. NVA divisions pushed into the Central Highlands through Cambodia on April 12, aiming to capture Kontum City. After coming close to splitting SV in two, the NV attack was finally repulsed on June 9 due to a combination of ARVN counterattacks and US Airpower.

C. What is Operation BULLETSHOT?



1. ... Was the codename for the buildup of B-52 bombers and supporting elements in Southeast Asia as part of efforts to counteract North Vietnamese pressure on South Vietnam.
2. In May 1968, the United States had begun negotiations with the North Vietnamese in Paris and had subsequently started to draw down the total US forces in South Vietnam. President Nixon, however, made sure to indicate that the United States would respond militarily to any overt action against South Vietnam.
3. In February 1972, 29 B-52s from Andersen Air Force Base, Guam and 10 KC-135s from Kadena Air Base, Japan were deployed to Southeast Asia as part of Operation Bullet Shot. These aircraft were deployed to U Tapao Air Base, Thailand. An additional 30 B-52 aircraft were deployed under Operation Bullet Shot to Andersen Air Force Base.
4. By 23 May 1972, a total force of 210 B-52D and B-52G aircraft were deployed in East Asia, which at the time was more than one-half of Strategic Air Command's entire strategic bomber force. By July 1972 a force of almost 50 B-52Ds, 100 B-52Gs, and over 12,000 personnel were bedded down at Anderson Air Force Base. These bombers and support aircraft participated in bombing raids against enemy targets all over Vietnam, including north of the demilitarized zone.
5. The buildup provided aircraft to support Operation Linebacker II, which began in December 1972 and is often credited with finally bringing the Paris peace talks to their conclusion.

D. What is Operation FREEDOM TRAIN?

1. By the spring of 1972, North Vietnam had assembled a force of about 200,000 men, along with a substantial amount of ammunition and supplies, for a last attempt at invading the South.
2. On March 29, 1972, enemy forces rolled directly across the demilitarized zone into South Vietnam during the Easter Offensive.
3. President Nixon responded to this invasion with "Operation Freedom Train", which called for the renewal of general air strikes throughout North Vietnam above the 20th parallel for the first time since 1968. The North Vietnamese invasion prompted increased air operations by the carriers in support of South Vietnamese and US forces.
4. Operation Freedom Train involved Navy tactical air sorties against military and logistic targets in the southern part of North Vietnam which were involved in the invasion of SVN. The operating area in North Vietnam was initially limited to between 17th and 19th parallel. However, special strikes were authorized against targets above the 19th parallel on various occasions.
5. The aerial interdiction campaign against North Vietnam which began on 6 April 1972 with attacks in the southern part of the country expanded



rapidly. Inclement weather along most bombing runs caused pilots to use precision instruments to destroy the targets during early April. However, once the weather cleared, visual strikes resumed, and the wing sent more and more aircraft into North Vietnam. The pilots on bombing runs were tasked to cut lines of communication and destroy transportation resources and surface-to-air missile sites.

E. What were the primary defense systems the North Vietnamese possessed?

1. Antiaircraft Artillery (AAA)
2. SAM

F. What is a SAM?

Surface to Air Missile designed to be launched from the ground to destroy aircraft or other missiles.

G. What types of SAMs did the North Vietnamese possess?

1. SA-2
2. Officially, the NV did not possess SA-3, but first-hand crewmember accounts beg to differ. Some crewdogs claim to not only have seen these, but to have heard Russians operating the SA-3 missile launch sites.

Operation LINEBACKER II

4.1 LINEBACKER II

A. How did President Nixon change the air war in VN in 1972?

1. President Nixon was racing the clock with an imminent cut off of funding set for January 1973.
2. He relaxed the ROE set forth by the JCS and his predecessors, finally taking the fight “downtown,” above the 20th parallel, into the heart of North Vietnam near Hanoi and Haiphong Harbor.
3. The relaxation of Rules of Engagement (ROE) allowed the war to be taken to the enemy’s heartland, without excessive civilian casualties, and “overwhelm the enemy’s military and industrial complex, and, thus, its will to continue the war.”
4. The nature of how campaigns are fought and the political landscape behind them is evident in the differences between the Johnson and Nixon administrations. John Schlight, in *A War Too Long*, explains that: “Unlike President Johnson, who preferred close personal control over individual targets, President Nixon tended, with some exceptions, to authorize strikes against areas or classes of targets and leave the details to his military commanders.”
5. Despite public opinion, Nixon decided to make one final push for victory. On December 18, 1972, LINEBACKER II got underway, in what began one of the most concentrated applications of air power in history.

B. What were the principal targets of LINEBACKER II?



1. SAM sites
2. Power generating plants
3. Railroad complexes
4. Military air fields
5. Storage facilities
6. *For a more detailed list, please see Gary Joiner, PhD and Ashley Dean, LINEBACKER II (White Paper), 144-151.*

C. What aircraft played a role in LINEBACKER II?

1. USAF B-52 D and G models
2. US Navy F-4, A-6, A-7, and RA-5C
3. USAF F-111
4. USAF F-4
5. USAF A-7
6. USAF F-105
7. KC-135 Tankers
8. USAF B-66

D. What air bases played a role in LINEBACKER II?

1. Andersen AFB, Guam
2. Ubon RTNAB, Thailand
3. U Tapao RTNAB, Thailand
4. Korat RTNAB, Thailand
5. Udorn RTNAB, Thailand
6. Da Nang AB, RVN
7. Seymour Johnson AFB, North Carolina
8. Eglin AFB, Florida

E. What was so significant about “going downtown?”

1. Until this point, the USAF was not allowed to bomb north of the 20th parallel.
2. Operation LINEBACKER II was the first time bombers were permitted to bomb in and around the areas of Hanoi and Haiphong in North Vietnam.

F. Was the SAM threat significant in North Vietnam, in and around Hanoi and Haiphong?

1. By this time, there were over 100 SAM sites in the Hanoi-Haiphong area.
2. SAC commanders did not initially see enemy defenses as a major threat, despite the Hanoi-Haiphong area being ranked the third best air defense behind the USSR and Israel.

G. What were the numbers for days 1-3 (Phase I)?

Six B-52s lost.

H. What went wrong on the first three days?



1. The tactics used on the first day, like those in ROLLING THUNDER, were too predictable. In the classic “V” formation, B-52s were sitting ducks for the SAM defenses around the capital.
2. The predictable patterns of B-52 sorties gave SAM operators the upper hand. By this time, there were over 100 SAM sites in the Hanoi-Haiphong area. The close flying formation of B-52s protected them from SAM detection, but if formation broke each plane became instantly vulnerable.

I. What changes were made after the first three days?

1. Crews, shocked by these losses, demanded tactical change.
2. Commanders took vulnerability into consideration, changed tactics, and reaped the rewards. This is what separates LINEBACKER II from ROLLING THUNDER and Arc Light.
3. SAC commanders did not initially see enemy defenses as a major threat, despite the Hanoi-Haiphong area being ranked the third best air defense behind the USSR and Israel.
4. Phase II of LINEBACKER II incorporated several changes to tactical and operational procedures. Most importantly, tactics, including interval rates between attacking waves were varied to prevent enemy predictability.
5. Target selection on the three previous days mainly focused on breaking the will of the NVA and insurgents in the South through maximum psychological impact. On this fourth day, in Phase II, the B-52 support force doubled, with SAM sites as the number one target. This is where the F-111s and Wild Weasels (F-105) came into play. The F-111s kept the Russian MIGS at bay, while the Wild Weasels destroyed SAM sites.
6. Attacks were staggered in time, distance, and altitude at the recommendation of flight crews.
7. These tactical changes, along with preemptive navy strikes against the SAM sites successfully overwhelmed NVA defenses. This shift to attacking defense positions achieved strategic and tactical objectives. Tactically, losing B-52s at the loss rate of the first three nights would have resulted in defeat. Strategically, taking out these SAM defenses allowed the U.S. to assert total dominance over the North, making strategic victory possible.

J. Did the Christmas Day halt allow the North to regroup?

1. Yes. The one-day halt on Christmas day emboldened the NV and gave them a chance to resupply.
2. The third and final phase began on December 26. Further tactical changes in this third phase offset Hanoi’s advantage from the Christmas Halt. SAC gave 8th Air Force authority to plan their own axis of attack and withdrawal routes. This added element of flexibility made all the difference. SAMS claimed two B-52Ds that night, but the mission dropped 9,932 bombs right on target within a 15-minute period.

K. What was the total number of sorties flown during LINEBACKER II?



1. 741 B-52 sorties flown, 729 of which completed their missions.
2. 170 SEAD sorties flown by F-105, F-4C and F-4E aircraft.
3. 390 CAP/Escort flights
4. 209 Chaff

L. What were the total number of losses during LINEBACKER II?

15 B-52s, 2 F-111s, 3 F-4 (US Navy), 1 EB-66C, 1 RA-5C (US Navy), 2 A-7 (US Navy), 2 A-6 (US Navy), and 1 HH-53= **27 total aircraft lost.**

4.2 Lessons Learned

A. Was LINEBACKER II a success?

Operation LINEBACKER II was successful on the three primary fronts: political, economic, and military.

1. Politically, it forced the North Vietnamese to return to the negotiating table in Paris with no stalling tactics and assured they would come to terms quickly. Finally, after nine years of micromanagement from two presidents, The Air Force was allowed to conduct a full-scale conventional air war. It fit in well with the lessons of history, particularly strategic bombing in Europe and the Pacific in World War II.
2. LINEBACKER II was “a classic example of the use of a well-planned and executed military operation to achieve a political goal.” The relaxation of Rules of Engagement (ROE) allowed the war to be taken to the enemy’s heartland, without excessive civilian casualties, and “overwhelm the enemy’s military and industrial complex, and, thus, its will to continue the war.”
3. Economically, as former Presidential advisor and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger described, “Linebacker II cost much less than the continuation of the war, which was the other alternative.” Speaking of the economics and political implications of continuing the war, Kissinger added:

“Any other course would almost certainly have witnessed an endless repetition of the tactics of December. Faced with the prospect of an open-ended war and continued bitter divisions, considering that the weather made the usual bombing ineffective, Nixon chose the only weapon he had available. His decision speeded the end of the war; even in retrospect I can think of no other measure that would have.”

B. Could the war have ended sooner?

1. The consensus of historians and military leaders, particularly Air Force commanders, is that the war could have been greatly shortened.



2. The Johnson Administration badly mishandled the entire Southeast Asia political and military issue.
3. During the Johnson White House, the Joint Chiefs of Staff forcefully argued for “dramatic, forceful, application of air power. Instead the U.S. adopted a strategy of a graduated military response.”
4. The president and his closest advisors, particularly Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, did not understand asynchronous warfare, particularly a major guerilla insurgency like that employed by the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese. This problem was compounded by corrupt South Vietnamese regimes. Successes were frittered away by bombing halts, refusal to allow the Air Force, Navy, and Marine bombers and ground attack aircraft to punish the North Vietnamese in and around their capital, Hanoi, and their primary port, Haiphong.
5. The Johnson Administration allowed itself to be hamstrung by a fear that the Soviet Union or the Peoples Republic of China would enter the war militarily as China had done in the Korean War. President Johnson made this fear into a shroud that covered all of this thinking about Southeast Asia.
6. The Nixon Administration inherited a morass of problems from the previous administration and it still took four years to complete the task.

C. What changes did LINEBACKER II bring about in strategic thinking?

The war offered many questions among war planners, both ground and air, about in what types of scenarios should certain weapons systems be used and whether massive numbers of ground troops should be deployed.

1. One question that arose from this was “**could coercion from the pure use of airpower work on an enemy who adopted a conventional warfare vulnerable to air power?**”

The answer is yes. The massive use of air power blunted both the Tet Offensive (1968) and the Easter Offensive (1972). During Hanoi’s switch to conventional warfare in 1972, Hanoi’s capabilities “were severely weakened due to the destruction of their war making materiel and infrastructure.”

2. The reverse of the above scenario is also pertinent. “**If an enemy is willing to bear the cost of demoralizing damage, might it be impervious to coercion?**”

Again, the answer in Vietnam was yes, up to a point. The misguided strategies of two American presidents to dangle enticements, with hopes to lure the North to come to the negotiating table actually aided North Vietnam in its quest to unify the Vietnams. The north had little to lose and foreign aid from Russia and China to replenish its materiel losses. It was only the détente begun by President Nixon



that separated the Russians and Chinese from the client state that allowed the Linebackers to succeed. Hanoi's population was largely indifferent to coercion during the Johnson Administration. Only when President Nixon broke with Johnson's strategy of ARC LIGHT and ROLLING THUNDER missions, and unleashed LINEBACKER I and LINEBACKER II, did the American's achieve their goal of getting out of Vietnam.

3. From post-World War II to the beginning of the Vietnam War, strategic bombers existed to execute their missions as part of the Strategic Air Command in a nuclear war. Vietnam changed that.

After the "Big Belly" conversion of B-52D models, and use of wing pylons for additional ordnance, strategic bombers delivered massive non-nuclear devastation at a relatively low economic cost. Warfare in an environment that is prone to constant cloud cover and monsoonal seasons meant that all-weather bombers could attack the enemy when tactical strike aircraft could not. It also forced Air Force planners to mix ordnance using guided smart weapons and unguided munitions.

D. Was the USAF influenced by LINEBACKER II?

1. Airpower doctrine evolved directly from both Linebacker campaigns.
2. Since the end of the Vietnam War, airpower doctrine theorists have studied two distinct ideas: precision attack at little cost to aircraft and crews, and the ability to deliver widespread destruction to coerce the enemy to bowing to one's will.
3. Technological advances in precision guided munitions (PGM) came into mainstream combat during LINEBACKER I and LINEBACKER II.
4. Post-Vietnam airpower doctrine can be traced through the Air Force Manual (AFM) 1-1. The role of the Air Force focused on fighting a conventional war in which the opponent is a first or second world nation. Immediately following Operation DESERT STORM, this AFM placed strategic bombing at a lower priority.

E. Was SAC influenced by LINEBACKER II?

Prior to Vietnam, SACs mission was to deliver thermonuclear weapons in a war with the Soviet Union. That was the entire reason for its existence. The political whims of three U.S. presidents changed that mission forever. The prestige of the B-52s made them a powerful tool in coercive diplomacy. The loss of some those great bombers opened the door to other views and other missions.

F. What are some notable operations that LINEBACKER II influenced?

1. EL DORADO CANYON (1986)
2. DESERT SHIELD / DESERT STORM (1990-91)
3. DELIBERATE FORCE (1995)



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4. NOBLE ANVIL / ALLIED FORCE (1999)
5. ANACONDA (2002)
6. IRAQI FREEDOM (2003-2010)
7. ENDURING FREEDOM (2001-2014)
8. NEW DAWN (2010-2011)
9. FREEDOMS SENTINEL (2015-present)
10. INHERENT RESOLVE (2014-present)

For a more detailed list, please see Gary Joiner, PhD and Ashley Dean, LINEBACKER II (White Paper), 144-151.

G. What were the major lessons learned from Operation LINEBACKER II?

1. WWII saturation bombing is too predictable.
2. Crew information and feedback must be used in future missions.
3. Combined air offensive with TAC and Navy assets must be used to suppress enemy defenses.
4. High Altitude Reconnaissance images are required to properly assess infrastructure damage.
5. Numbered USAF leadership should be able to interpret and alter higher orders WITHIN REASON.
6. The one-day halt on Christmas day emboldened the NV and gave them a change to resupply...
7. Constant pressure must be placed on enemy.

Attached along with this lesson plan are important maps and figures, abbreviations, and a definitive bibliography on the subject.

All information in this Lesson Plan taken from:

Gary Joiner, PhD and Ashley Dean, *LINEBACKER II* (White Paper), SAC-LSUS 2017.

Ashley Dean, *Lessons from the Misuse of Airpower in the American Vietnam Conflict* (Masters Thesis), LSUS 2017.