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Candidate session number

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Examination session (May or November)

MAY

Year

2014

Diploma Programme subject in which this extended essay is registered: HISTORY

(For an extended essay in the area of languages, state the language and whether it is group 1 or group 2.)

Title of the extended essay: To what extent was Operation Linebacker II in December 1972 a success for the US government?

### Candidate's declaration

*This declaration must be signed by the candidate; otherwise a grade may not be issued.*

The extended essay I am submitting is my own work (apart from guidance allowed by the International Baccalaureate).

I have acknowledged each use of the words, graphics or ideas of another person, whether written, oral or visual.

I am aware that the word limit for all extended essays is 4000 words and that examiners are not required to read beyond this limit.

This is the final version of my extended essay.

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## Supervisor's report and declaration

The supervisor must complete this report, sign the declaration and then give the final version of the extended essay, with this cover attached, to the Diploma Programme coordinator.

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Please comment, as appropriate, on the candidate's performance, the context in which the candidate undertook the research for the extended essay, any difficulties encountered and how these were overcome (see page 13 of the extended essay guide). The concluding interview (viva voce) may provide useful information. These comments can help the examiner award a level for criterion K (holistic judgment). Do not comment on any adverse personal circumstances that may have affected the candidate. If the amount of time spent with the candidate was zero, you must explain this, in particular how it was then possible to authenticate the essay as the candidate's own work. You may attach an additional sheet if there is insufficient space here.

has excellent intellectual abilities and a genuine desire to become a historian. He conducted an impressive research on one of the operations of the Vietnam War. His selection of the topic (which is tending itself to Vietnamese propaganda) demonstrates how was willing and keen to challenge his previously taught perceptions. I think, it is a rather commendable aim and a definite difficulty to cope with. In terms of research, visited two museums in Hanoi and read a wide range of material from both sides. His meetings with me, including the viva voce interview have convinced me that this candidate definitely has the top qualities for writing history and he put all his effort into completing this challenging task.

This declaration must be signed by the supervisor; otherwise a grade may not be issued.

I have read the final version of the extended essay that will be submitted to the examiner.

To the best of my knowledge, the extended essay is the authentic work of the candidate.

I spent  hours with the candidate discussing the progress of the extended essay.

Supervisor's signature: \_\_\_\_\_



History Extended Essay

2013

**To what extent was Operation Linebacker II in December 1972 a success for the U.S. government?**

An appropriate research question and capable of being addressed within the 4000 word limit.

Word count: 3 965

## Abstract

On December 18 1972, the U.S. started bombing Hanoi intensely with Operation Linebacker II. One month later, due to the bombings, the Paris Peace Accord was signed, which enabled the U.S. government to end its direct military involvement in the Vietnam War. This essay examines the effects of this operation by answering the question: **“To what extent was Operation Linebacker II a success for the U.S. government?”**

In order to assess Operation Linebacker II, this essay discusses Nixon’s war aims, the negotiation process between the two sides in 1972 after the Easter Offensive, and the aims of the operation and its military and political impact on Hanoi, especially the Paris Peace Accord. A number of sources are used including an interview with a survivor of the bombings, visits to two museums in Vietnam, as well as books, films and articles from both the U.S. and Vietnam. Although the scope of this essay starts from 1969, when Nixon began serving as U.S. President, the fighting between 1969 and 1971 is not discussed. The focus of this essay is the year 1972, in which negotiations sped up and Operation Linebacker II occurred, as well as the first month of 1973, in which the Paris Peace Accord was signed. The U.S. involvement and the Vietnamese struggles after the Paris Peace Accord are not investigated.

Juxtaposing what Operation Linebacker II had achieved with what its aims were, this essay concludes that the operation was an immediate success for the U.S. government. However, its aims as well as Nixon’s war aims at that time were quite restricted. In terms of war balance, the operation did not bring about any significant changes. Hence, even though it is unlikely that Operation Linebacker II could achieve more than what it actually did, its success was only limited.

Word count: 299

The research question is clearly stated and put into context. The scope indicates the areas of investigation which will be undertaken, provides a chronological framework and an explanation of why this framework has been chosen. It's not necessary though to say what won't be covered - focus on what will be. The conclusion is clear and makes reference to the demands of a "to what extent" command term. The abstract is worthy of the 2 marks.

## Introduction

On October 26 1972, Henry Kissinger, the U.S. National Security Advisor, announced in a press conference that "peace is at hand"<sup>1</sup>. Ironically, two months later, between 18<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> December, a major bombing operation, Linebacker II, or Christmas Bombings, was launched against North Vietnam to bomb the Hanoi and Haiphong areas using B-52 Stratofortress and other tactical aircraft<sup>2</sup>. With 15,000 tons of bombs being dropped by the B-52 bombers alone, it became the largest operation launched by the U.S. Air Force since the end of World War II<sup>3</sup>.

Linebacker II occurred at a very critical time in the Vietnam War. After 3 years of fighting while negotiating from 1969, the war was still at stalemate. In October 1972, negotiations between the U.S. and North Vietnam for a peace settlement had a real breakthrough for the first time but in December they came to a deadlock again. Linebacker II helped break the deadlock and eventually led to the signing of Paris Peace Accord in 27 January 1973, which forced the complete withdrawal of U.S. ground troops from Vietnam.

Born and raised in Hanoi, I have learnt a lot about this part of my country's history. Moreover, my mother's family was living in the Kham Thien area when it was bombed by B-52s on December 26<sup>4</sup>. Therefore, I was told a lot of first-hand stories and became even more fascinated by that topic. However, having been influenced by the Vietnamese propaganda system, I have only seen one side of the story. Through Vietnamese books, films and banners, I have only known Linebacker II as "Dien Bien Phu in the skies", a "military triumph" for Hanoi<sup>5</sup>. But it is very important to see this operation from many perspectives because of its significance for both sides. For North Vietnam, it was a huge step towards the reunification of Vietnam while for the U.S., Linebacker II marked the ending of its direct involvement in the Vietnam War. Thus, when given the research opportunity, I decided to write this essay on the Christmas Bombings to answer the question: **To what extent was Operation Linebacker II in December 1972 a success for the U.S. government?**

significance/  
worthiness  
addressed.

Hanoi sources claimed that Operation Linebacker II was "crushed" by North Vietnam, with none of its principle aims accomplished<sup>6</sup>. However, the essay will counter that argument. First of all, the investigation will look at Nixon's war aims along with the war situation starting from 1969.

The historical context is provided and clearly articulated. It's not necessary to state the "personal motivation" behind the choice of topic/research question. Significance (or worthiness) is noted and the research question is clearly stated in this introduction as well as on the title page - and coversheet. This satisfies the requirements for criterion B in full.

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<sup>1</sup> Kissinger, Henry. *Ending the Vietnam War*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003, 375.

<sup>2</sup> Karnow, Stanley. *Vietnam: A History*. New York: Penguin Group, 1983, 652-653.

<sup>3</sup> Boyne, Walter J. "Linebacker II." *Air Force Magazine*, November 1997. Accessed July 26, 2013.

<http://www.airforcemag.com/MagazineArchive/Pages/1997/November%201997/1197linebacker.aspx>.

<sup>4</sup> See Appendix 1 on page 14 for an interview with my grandmother Lanh Thi Thu.

<sup>5</sup> *Hiep Dinh Paris*. Directed by Phong Lan Le. 2013.

<sup>6</sup> Air and Air Defense Force. *In remembrance of Hanoi - Dien Bien Phu on the skies 40 years ago*. Translated by Anh Vo. Hanoi: National Political Publishing House, 2012, 316.

## Nixon's war aims

In August 1968 Nixon said: "The first priority foreign policy objective will be to bring an honourable end to the war in Vietnam"<sup>7</sup>. Nixon's "peace with honour" was his main aim regarding the Vietnam War and it was because of the need for this honourable peace that Nixon eventually decided to bomb Hanoi with Operation Linebacker II.

Therefore, Nixon's problem then was not whether to get out of the war but how to get out. According to historian Jeffrey Kimball, Nixon wanted to end the war with a diplomatic agreement that would end the fighting, permit the U.S. troop withdrawal and most importantly, preserve the Saigon regime and South Vietnamese state<sup>8</sup>. The last point is where American honour lied upon. The first and minimum condition of this point was the maintenance of Thieu as the President of South Vietnam; nevertheless, a complete preservation of the Thieu regime in the near and distant future necessitated the forced withdrawal of People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN) from the South and the defeat of the Communist-led side in South Vietnam<sup>9</sup>.

Even though he always asked for a "peace with honour", the degree of honour did not stay the same throughout the war. After three years of offensives and Vietnamization<sup>10</sup> from 1969 to 1971, Nixon made very little progress on the military front; on the diplomatic front, even though peace talks began in May 1968, there was no development by 1971, either<sup>11</sup>. Meanwhile, U.S. troops started withdrawing from Vietnam from June 1969; by October 1972, the forces had been reduced from 543,000 to 25,000<sup>12</sup>. With U.S. forces being withdrawn, Nixon had lost his leverage in negotiations. Without gaining military advantages, it was unlikely that by 1972, he still aimed for bilateral troops' withdrawal. It meant that he could not insist on a full preservation of the Saigon regime since as long as there were PAVN troops in the South, Saigon's security was not improved. Yet, he still needed his "peace with honour"; as a result, this time his standards for honour were minimized. A prerequisite for a settlement was still keeping Thieu in power but now, instead of a total protection, the Saigon regime could necessarily be kept for only, in Kissinger's words, a "decent interval" as a face-saving formula<sup>13</sup>. Even though he later claimed that he meant an interval before free elections<sup>14</sup>, it was likely that he was trying to vindicate for his support of this policy.

## Negotiations: Breakthrough – Deadlock

On March 30 1972, North Vietnam launched the Easter Offensive, a conventional frontal assault, with 150,000 troops, causing South Vietnam to crumble initially<sup>15</sup>. However, the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) fought back with the backing of U.S. bombing operation Linebacker; by

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<sup>7</sup> Asselin, Pierre. *A Bitter Peace*. Washinton, Hanoi, and the Making of the Paris Agreement. Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002, 13.

<sup>8</sup> Kimball, Jeffrey. *The Vietnam War Files: Uncovering the Secret History of Nixon - Era Strategy*. Lawrence: University Press Of Kansas, 2003, 10.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, 8.

<sup>10</sup> Turning over all the fighting responsibility to South Vietnam.

<sup>11</sup> *Vietnam in HD*. Directed by Sammy Jackson. 2011.

<sup>12</sup> Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War*, 331.

<sup>13</sup> Sanders, Vivienne. *The U.S.A and VIETNAM 1945-75*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1998, 122.

<sup>14</sup> Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War*, 338.

<sup>15</sup> Jackson, *Vietnam in HD*.

July, the offensive stalled, prompting earnest talks between Kissinger and Le Duc Tho, member of the Hanoi Politburo and the North Vietnamese main negotiator<sup>16</sup>. The coming negotiations will be thoroughly analysed to determine the main aims of the Operation Linebacker II.

Sensing opportunity in the coming U.S. presidential election on November 7, Hanoi pushed Nixon to settle before the elections by giving real concessions, which led to a breakthrough in the October round of negotiations<sup>17</sup>. Tho proposed that Hanoi would separate military and political problems and only agreed upon military questions between them – withdrawal, prisoners, cease-fire, leaving the political issues for negotiation between the Vietnamese<sup>18</sup>. It meant that Hanoi no longer insisted on a coalition government and more importantly, on overthrowing Thieu. It was probably the biggest concession that Hanoi had ever made on the negotiation table, which prompted Kissinger to negotiate intensely from October 8 and by October 12 and a settlement on principal issues <sup>wf</sup> were reached<sup>19</sup>. On October 22, the United States and the North settled on a draft agreement<sup>20</sup>. While political points were left very vague, militarily, there would be a cease-fire throughout South Vietnam; American prisoners of war would be released simultaneously with troop withdrawals; replacement of armament for South Vietnam would be allowed. In return, there was no provision for the withdrawal of PAVN troops from the South<sup>21</sup>. This point was strongly protested by Thieu. Historian Sorley believed that the acquiescence in the presence of the North Vietnamese in the South virtually guaranteed the eventual loss of South Vietnam<sup>22</sup>. However, Kissinger argued that since 1969 the U.S. had been withdrawing unilaterally; therefore he could not insist on mutual withdrawal<sup>23</sup>. Even though the draft was not brilliant, it was the best that U.S. could get at that point. It basically brought the "peace with honour" that Nixon needed, which could enable the temporary survival of South Vietnam.

However, Thieu publicly denounced the agreement, strongly attacking the allowance of North Vietnam's troops in the South. On October 31, negotiations were deadlocked again<sup>24</sup>. There has been great debate surrounding the main reasons for this deadlock, which lead to different views on the aims of Operation Linebacker II. In an interview with historian Charlton for the book *Many reasons why* (1978), Sir Robert Thompson believed that the deal was not good enough for Nixon – "Nixon was the rock"<sup>25</sup>. In the book *Vietnam: Anatomy of war* (1985), historian Kolko argued that Thieu only served as a "convenient excuse for American procrastination" and the main reason was the presidential election coming on November 7<sup>26</sup>. Signing an agreement at that point would cause <sup>expl.</sup> bureaucratic and political problems, as Nixon would be accused of using it as an electoral ploy. In *Grasshoppers and Elephants* (1977), historian Burchett also agreed that the coming election played **requires clarification.**

develop  
and clarify

<sup>16</sup> Robert A. Pape, Jr. "Coercive Air Power In the Vietnam War." *International Security*, 1990: 103-146.

<sup>17</sup> Nguyen, Lien Hang Thi. *Hanoi's War*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2012, 268.

<sup>18</sup> Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War*, 327-337.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, 336.

<sup>20</sup> See Appendix 2 on page 16 for the key points of the draft.

<sup>21</sup> Kimball, *The Vietnam War Files*, 254.

<sup>22</sup> Sorley, Lewis. *A Better War: The Unexamined Victories And Final Tragedy of Ameica's Last Years In Vietnam*. Orlando: Harcourt, 1999, 351.

<sup>23</sup> Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War*, 331.

<sup>24</sup> Burchett, Wilfred. *Grasshoppers & Elephants: Why Vietnam Fell*. New York: Urizen Books, 1977, 159.

<sup>25</sup> Charlton, Michael, and Moncrieff, Anthony. *Many Reasons Why: the American involvement in Vietnam*. London: Scolar Press, 1978, 204.

<sup>26</sup> Kolko, Gabriel. *Vietnam: Anatomy of War 1940-1975*. London: Allen & Unwin Ltd , 1985, 437-438.

an important role but went even further by calling Thieu a “puppet” being used by Nixon<sup>27</sup>. But these three books were published not long after the war, thus, they did not have access to new evidence, which pointed out that Nixon privately instructed Kissinger to “do what is right without regard to the election”<sup>28</sup>. In more recent books, with private talks and cables being revealed, there is more of a consensus that Thieu really did obstruct the negotiations – as Kimball said, “the tail, was wagging the dog”<sup>29 30 31</sup>. Even though the argument that Thieu was only an excuse for the delay seems convincing as Thieu could not survive without American money, it is noteworthy that Nixon could not have the appearance of betraying his ally and a blow-up with Thieu would hurt his position in the election.

Develop and provide evidence

The Hanoi’s version of the whole negotiation process is quite different. Hanoi claimed that the U.S. had to negotiate because of the North Vietnamese major victories on the battlefield and Nixon’s desire to use the negotiations for the election. When an agreement was reached, Nixon’s “duplicity” was revealed – he rejected it immediately. Nixon was not satisfied with the draft and wanted to end the war more favourably for the U.S.<sup>32</sup>. However, Hanoi sources are all published by the Communist party; their main purposes are propaganda. They tend to put the blame on the U.S. most of the time and use very strong and negative adjectives such against it such as “wicked,” “devious”<sup>33</sup> while always putting Hanoi in a much stronger position. This time, Hanoi’s argument serve to build up evidence for the claim that Operation Linebacker II was crushed by Hanoi, being a huge fiasco for the U.S.

There is an attempt here to “evaluate” but deserves more development.

Even though negotiations were resumed after the election and continued throughout December, no agreement was reached. Since Thieu publicly denounced the draft treaty, Nixon had to get some changes in order not to appear as betraying his ally. On the first day of negotiations, Kissinger was directed to put forward 69 “preposterous” changes, he believed, requested by Saigon<sup>34</sup>, which again proved that the U.S. did have real problems with Thieu. This was a huge mistake. Even though at first Hanoi accepted some minor alterations, Tho started withdrawing some concessions later<sup>35</sup>, perhaps sensing the discord between Nixon and Saigon. Kissinger accused Tho of “playing cat and mouse”<sup>36</sup>, keeping the negotiations going without concluding an agreement. Finally, on 13 December, the talks were suspended.

provide detail.

## Operation Linebacker II and its aims

With negotiations being stalemated again, Nixon was running short of time. If an agreement were not reached the Congress would cut off funds in January and North Vietnam merely had to wait until “Congress voted U.S. out of the war”<sup>37</sup>. Hanoi “cornered” Nixon; he decided to escalate militarily

<sup>27</sup> Burchett, *Grasshoppers & Elephants*, 160-161.

<sup>28</sup> Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War*, 334.

<sup>29</sup> Kimball, *The Vietnam War Files*, 255.

<sup>30</sup> Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War*, 358-369.

<sup>31</sup> Nguyen, *Hanoi’s War*, 280.

<sup>32</sup> Ho, Khang, et al. *History of Resistance War Against America*. Part VII: Decisive victory in 1972. Translated by Anh Vo. Hanoi: National Political Publishing House, 2007, 383.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, 6.

<sup>34</sup> Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 651.

<sup>35</sup> Asselin, *A Bitter Peace*, 136-137.

<sup>36</sup> Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War*, 390.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, 409.

with Operation Linebacker II, which was launched on 18 December 1972. Starting from South Vietnam and Thailand, the U.S. air force dropped some 40,000 tons of bombs on the Hanoi and Haiphong areas<sup>38 39</sup>, but Hanoi claimed that there were 100,000 tons being dropped<sup>40</sup>. The specific targets were rail yards and marshalling areas, petroleum storage facilities, missile storage sites, docks and warehouses<sup>41</sup>.

According to the U.S. Air Force, the main military aim was the “destruction of major target complexes in vicinity of Hanoi and Haiphong” while sparing civilian targets in order to inflict severe damage to the North Vietnamese “logistic and war supporting capability” and make a “psychological impact” on North Vietnamese “morale”<sup>42</sup>. On the other hand, North Vietnam claimed that the U.S. had carpet-bombed Hanoi and Haiphong, (only) citing the bombing of Bach Mai hospital and Kham Thien Street as the examples of “American crimes against civilians”<sup>43</sup>.

Its political aims were more ambiguous. Since the decision to bomb Hanoi was taken when negotiations stalled, one obvious aim was to force Hanoi to give more concessions on the negotiation table. Nevertheless, whether or not this was the most important aim is not agreed among historians. Historians Sanders, Kimball and Karnow all pointed to reassuring Thieu as the main purpose of this operation. Nixon was already <sup>evident</sup> satisfied with the October draft treaty but Thieu publicly denounced it. Hence, with the Linebacker II Operation, Nixon convinced Thieu of renewed air support if the North Vietnamese violated terms of the agreement so that Thieu could stop protesting. Yet, it is hard to believe that Nixon would risk a major bombing operation, which would cause an outrage both domestically and internationally, just to placate Thieu, without any guarantee that Thieu would be persuaded. Moreover, the U.S. had been demonstrating their huge support for Thieu regime through the Easter Offensive with Operation Linebacker as well as by Project Enhance and Enhance plus<sup>44</sup> at the end of 1972, which left South Vietnam with the world’s fourth-largest air force and a huge quantity of tanks, artillery and helicopters<sup>45</sup>. Another effort to satisfy Thieu seemed to be superfluous. Also, the notion that the bombing would impress on Thieu the strength of the American commitment is not even suggested in Nixon’s personal notes<sup>46</sup>.

Even though forcing Hanoi back to the negotiation table with a “serious” attitude was the first and foremost aim, the number of concessions that U.S. wanted from Hanoi is quite often misunderstood. Historians Karnow and Lien Hang criticized the similarity between the Paris Peace Accord and the \* October draft but did Nixon want more than that? Did he want Linebacker II Operation to become a decisive military victory and to get him a much better deal just as Hanoi claimed<sup>47</sup>? In fact, he was satisfied with the October draft; it was a better deal than he expected. All he needed were some changes, not too minor but not necessarily significant, enough to look like he did try to force Thieu

<sup>38</sup> Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 653.

<sup>39</sup> For the detailed map of the operation, see Appendix 3 on page 18.

<sup>40</sup> Le, *Hiep Dinh Paris*.

<sup>41</sup> Sorley, *A Better War*, 355.

<sup>42</sup> Kimball, *The Vietnam War Files*, 279.

<sup>43</sup> See Appendix 4 on page 19.

<sup>44</sup> Operation Enhance and Enhance Plus were the emergency transfers of American military supplies and bases to South Vietnam before a peace accord was signed.

<sup>45</sup> Kolko, *Anatomy of War*, 438.

<sup>46</sup> Asselin, *A Bitter Peace*, 145

<sup>47</sup> Ho, Khang, et al. *History of Resistance War Against America*, 391.

to sign the settlement. Thieu was the focus here but instead of placating Thieu, Operation Linebacker II was calculated to get some leverage for Nixon to, more accurately, blackmail Thieu. <sup>Is this the most appropriate term here?</sup> Moreover, with this operation Nixon aimed to “intimidate and terrorize North Vietnam regarding the future”<sup>48</sup>. He wanted to demonstrate his “brutal unpredictability”<sup>49</sup> so that Hanoi would not dare to violate the Peace Accord in the future. This was his opportunity to guarantee a “decent interval” and his “peace with honour”.

## Military assessment of Operation Linebacker II

Other than in Hanoi sources, there has been consensus that Operation Linebacker II had a great impact on Hanoi military capabilities and its morale. Even though North Vietnam was not surprised by the attack itself as Tho already received threats from the U.S. when the December negotiations stalled, it was taken aback by the magnitude of the bombing; consequently, Hanoi assumed the bombing would last only 3 days and directed anti-aircraft forces expend as many missiles as necessary to have an effect<sup>50</sup>. As a result, its SAM missiles were depleted; on the last day of the operation, Hanoi was only able to fire 23 SAMs despite firing more than 1240 SAMs in total<sup>51</sup>. Across the eleven days, 3420 sorties, including 729 sorties of B-52 bombed North Vietnam, inflicted severe physical and psychological damage<sup>52</sup>. According to American assessments, the bombing damaged or destroyed 1600 military complexes, 372 trucks and railway cars, 25 percent of the DRVN’s petroleum stockpiles, 80 percent of its electrical power plants<sup>53</sup>. By the end of the operation, concluded the Air Force, there were no more “worthwhile” military targets in the Hanoi and Haiphong complexes; industrial capacity was virtually brought to a halt<sup>54</sup>.

Regarding civilian targets, Hanoi claimed that there were 5,480 houses destroyed, 2,368 civilians killed and 1,355 wounded<sup>55</sup>. Although these figures were perceived as very low, Charlton and Kissinger believed that these figures had been almost surely exaggerated in order to generate international protests<sup>5657</sup>. The operation was designed to spare civilian targets and at the same time, the accuracy was extremely high: 94% of the planes released their ordnance on assigned targets<sup>58</sup>. In addition, Hanoi was largely evacuated to the countryside before the operation. However, in an interview with Mrs Lanh –a witness of the bombings, even though she sometimes contradicted herself, she affirmed that many people did not agree to leave their houses because they were so poor that they would die of hunger<sup>59</sup>. It took more than two weeks to pull the corpses out of the

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<sup>48</sup> Kolko, *Anatomy of War*, 441.

<sup>49</sup> Kimball, *The Vietnam War Files*, 272.

<sup>50</sup> Asselin, *A Bitter Peace*, 147.

<sup>51</sup> Boyne, “Linebacker II”.

<sup>52</sup> Nguyen, *Hanoi’s War*, 295.

<sup>53</sup> Asselin, *A Bitter Peace*, 152.

<sup>54</sup> Sorley, *A Better War*, 355.

<sup>55</sup> Air and Air Defense Force, *In Remembrance of*, 7.

<sup>56</sup> Charlton and Moncrieff, *Many Reasons Why*, 206.

<sup>57</sup> Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War*, 147-148.

<sup>58</sup> Asselin, *A Bitter Peace*, 145.

<sup>59</sup> Lanh, Thi Thu, interview by Anh Vo, (1 August 2013).

wreckages because Kham Thien was a very populated area. Yet, civilian morale was actually boosted instead of declining<sup>60</sup>.

However, the price that the U.S. had to pay militarily was not inconsequential. On the third day, the U.S. Air Force suffered from a seven-percent loss rate of B-52s, which was deemed unacceptably high. Due to some changes in tactics later on and the exhaustion of the SAM missiles, the rate went down to an acceptable two-percent rate overall<sup>61</sup>. Thus, Hanoi's claim that Nixon had to stop the operation because of the large number of B-52s being shot down is flawed<sup>62</sup>. The U.S. lost 15 B-52 bombers, while Hanoi claimed it had shot down 34 B-52s<sup>63</sup>. Nonetheless, the American military loss was not significant when compared to the damage that the Air Force had inflicted on Hanoi.

## Political impacts of Operation Linebacker II

On 26 December, Hanoi accepted the American offer to resume the peace talks and on December 30, Nixon halted the bombing<sup>64</sup>. With a military victory against Hanoi, Nixon finally had strong leverage to push Hanoi for some diplomatic gains. On January 8, private talks between Kissinger and Tho were resumed. While in November, negotiations lasted for nearly one month without bearing any results, on 13 January, after only 5 days, the draft agreement was completed and the Paris Peace Accord was signed on 27 January<sup>65</sup>. There was an obvious change in the North Vietnamese negotiating attitude after Operation Linebacker II; thus, the final treaty was the direct result of the December bombings.

Compared to the October draft, there were some twelve changes in the final Paris Peace Accord<sup>66</sup>. The most significant changes were probably the explicit affirmation of the Demilitarized Zone and the prohibition of military movement across it<sup>67</sup>. Many historians pointed to the similarity between the two agreements as the failure of Operation Linebacker II. Historian Karnow described the Christmas Bombings as "superfluous" as an instrument of diplomacy<sup>68</sup> and historian Lien Hang criticised Washington for "accepting terms that it had rejected"<sup>69</sup>. Yet, they failed to acknowledge that theoretically, if the changes in the agreement were to be respected by both sides, the PAVN troops in the South would be eventually eroded and the survival of Saigon would be guaranteed. This definitely looked good on paper but Nixon and Kissinger both knew that Hanoi would not heed the ceasefire arrangement<sup>70 71</sup>. Without concession by Hanoi to withdraw troops from the South, the security of South Vietnam would never be actually improved. Therefore, these changes were only intended to get Thieu's signature – one of the main aims of Operation Linebacker II and perhaps the only real difference between the two agreements. In fact, it was not easy to get his approval after

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<sup>60</sup> Lanh, Thi Thu, interview by Anh Vo, (1 August 2013)

<sup>61</sup> Boyne, "Linebacker II".

<sup>62</sup> Ho et al. *History of Resistance War Against America*, 393.

<sup>63</sup> See Appendix 5 on page 19.

<sup>64</sup> Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War*, 416.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid*, 424. *Page 55*

<sup>66</sup> Robert, *Coercive Air Power in the Vietnam War*, 140.

<sup>67</sup> Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War*, 424.

<sup>68</sup> Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 654.

<sup>69</sup> Nguyen, *Hanoi's War*, 297.

<sup>70</sup> Webb, Jonathan. "Nixon's withdrawal from Vietnam." *20th Century History Review*, September 2010, 27.

<sup>71</sup> Asselin, *A Bitter Peace*, 133.

the December bombings. Thieu was still asking for changes privately but this time, Nixon threatened Thieu by blaming him for obstructing peace and cutting off aids for Saigon because he had gotten enough changes in the agreement to look like he had tried hard to secure Saigon a good peace<sup>72</sup>. In the end, Thieu was compelled to sign, accomplish the first aim of Operation Linebacker II. Moreover, this argument failed to explain why Hanoi agreed to return to the negotiating table before the Congress acted to end the war in January. Indeed, Hanoi was satisfied with the October draft, which was basically what Hanoi got in the end. But when Hanoi suspended the talks in December, North Vietnam had sensed the discord between Washington and Saigon and wanted to delay the agreement to take advantages of the Congressional deadline. Hence, when Hanoi accepted the American offer to resume talks, it meant that Operation Linebacker II had influenced North Vietnamese strategy, stopping its intention to procrastinate.

Not only did Operation Linebacker II bring about a settlement but it also enforced the “decent interval” that Nixon wanted. By April 1973, there were roughly 150,000 PAVN troops in the South, essentially the same as the year before and seven months later, Hanoi could launch a full-scale offensive if it wished<sup>73</sup>. However, Hanoi waited until 1975 to unleash the final offensives that crushed ARVN and the Saigon regime. According to the CIA station chief in Saigon, the risk that American air power might return to the North worried Hanoi and only after the resignation of Nixon in 1974 was Hanoi confident to authorize the final offensives<sup>74</sup>. Hence, Operation Linebacker II played an important role in the Saigon’s ability to survive for two years instead of one year and a half as Kissinger predicted<sup>75</sup>.

To achieve these gains, Nixon also had to pay (some) significant political price. Both domestic and international criticisms against the Christmas bombings were intense. In a poll of senators during the operation, forty five opposed the bombing, nineteen supported it and nine withheld their opinion<sup>76</sup>. The media reacted with outrage. A *New York Times* editorial described the bombings as “Stone Age barbarism” and the *Washington Post* called Nixon “savage and senseless”<sup>77</sup>. Reactions from some pro-American nations were equally critical<sup>78</sup>. Interestingly, despite strong public condemnations from Moscow and Beijing, both allies of Hanoi privately pressured North Vietnam to settle with the U.S<sup>79</sup>. However, these public protests could not affect Nixon’s determination to bomb Hanoi as he was prepared to pay the price. Nixon’s reputation was definitely damaged but it was nothing compared to the reputation he would lose if an agreement were not reached before Congress decided to cut off aids to Saigon. Also, the only reactions that Nixon cared about were probably from Moscow and Beijing but then both of them decided to pressurize Hanoi privately.

Why would be care about these in 1972/3? Explain in context.

There is need for supporting evidence to substantiate the claims being made above.

<sup>72</sup> Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War*, 427.

<sup>73</sup> Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 657.

<sup>74</sup> Robert, “Coercive Air Power in the Vietnam War”, 140-141.

<sup>75</sup> Webb, *Nixon’s withdrawal from Vietnam*, 27.

<sup>76</sup> Kolko, *Anatomy of War*, 441-442.

<sup>77</sup> Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, 653.

<sup>78</sup> Air and Air Defense Force, *In Remembrance of*, 470-477.

<sup>79</sup> Nguyen, *Hanoi’s War*, 295.

## Conclusion

Comparing what Operation Linebacker II had achieved and what its aims were, the operation was an immediate success for the U.S. government. It left such a great military impact on Hanoi that there was an instant change on the political scene. Hanoi went back to the negotiation table right after the bombings with a serious attitude, which broke the deadlock created earlier in December and led to the signing of the Paris Peace Accord. Even though the operation only achieved some not-so-significant changes from the previous draft, it was able to bring exactly what Nixon wanted: an agreement with Thieu's signature. It also succeeded in portraying Nixon's "brutal unpredictability", helping to delay Hanoi's final offensives and enforcing his "decent interval". In return, the price that Nixon had to pay was only the loss of some B-52s, which was considered acceptable, and the damage of his reputation, which could have been much worse if an agreement was not reached. In short, Operation Linebacker II had achieved all of its main aims with a reasonable price.

However, the success of Operation Linebacker II should not be exaggerated because its aims were quite restricted. Facing with an imminent cut-off of aid to South Vietnam by the Congress, Nixon knew that he could not aim for any significant change in terms of war balance; he needed to end the war as soon as possible. On a broader aspect, by that time, Nixon's "peace with honour" most important criterion was already reduced from a complete preservation of Thieu regime to a temporary survival of South Vietnam – "a decent interval". Both the Christmas bombings' aims and Nixon's war aims were reduced to the minimum that Nixon had to get; and the bombings achieved just that. Indeed, it brought the best that U.S. could get in those circumstances but its success was only limited.

The conclusion is consistent with what has gone before.

The research question is suitably narrow and focused. At times there is a need for better supporting evidence/referencing in order to provide a more convincing argument. The essay has been clearly written for the most part but at times clarity of expression needed to be improved. While not perfect, a focused task and a creditable attempt to remain "on task" throughout. The essay is quite well planned and resourced.

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Date visited: 20/07/2013.

Vietnam National Military History Museum.  
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## Appendices

### Appendix 1 – Interview with

(1935 - ) is my grandmother. She has been living on , in the area since the 1950s and she used to work in a shoe factory on . She was evacuated after the U.S. dropped bombs on Bach Mai Hospital and went back to work right after the bombings ended.

Were there many people evacuated?

Everyone, from old people to small kids, was evacuated. People on : were all forced to go; people who died were the ones that decided to stay. Everyone was forced to go – it was complete evacuation – you could not stay.

: Were people from completely evacuated?

: Not many people living in the alleys agree to go. They mostly bombed those alleys. Many people died; I don't know exactly how many people died. The street lights fell down on bomb shelters so you could not pull people out. They still died even if they went down to the bomb shelter [...] They bombed on the night of December 26.

Did you go right back the day after?

No, I could not go back. The U.S. lost and then the bombing stopped. When it seemed like everything was ok I went back.

[...]

Were people afraid?

Of course. There were people who did not agree to be evacuated. They did not want to leave, they just stayed. They thought that the bombs could not come to their places. In fact, the B-52s carpet-bombed the area. It was horrible.

So actually they were not forced to be evacuated, weren't they?

No, no one forced them. The Party just encouraged people, if they did not want to go nobody would care. Some families were so poor that they did not want to go. If they had gone they would have died of hunger.

How did they bomb the Kham Thien Street?

They bombed from the beginning of the street to the market, causing so many people die; that was where they bombed the most. And then they continued until the end of the street. The was so crowded, so many people died. Weeks afterwards we were still pulling people out; corpses were everywhere and the streetlights were still all over the place. There were only civil defence force and other people digging without any machinery. I did not remember how long it took to reconstruct but pulling dead people out alone took more than half a month. [...]

When did evacuation start?

I do not remember exactly when but at least half a month before. I let my children go but my smallest child and I did not go. When they bombed Bach Mai hospital, I had to leave. My husband told me not to go through that hospital, it had just been bombed. I still went, houses were still on fire, and dead people were still there. There was a sign: "Bombs have not exploded. No passing". Yet, I continued biking because I did not know any other ways [...]

How was civilian morale after the bombings?

They were actually not scared of the enemy. The morale was incredible. The planes were raiding intensely but they still climbed up to the top floor of a two-storey house, put sandbag around and started firing with normal guns [...]

Was your factory fine?

A bomb was dropped right at the middle of the yard but other buildings were ok [...] When people died, their flesh were shot onto the walls. I could see for sure that it was human flesh because there were clothes sticking on. It was disgusting. There were 6 people in my factory died, three of them were from my group.

[...]

## Appendix 2 – Summary of October draft agreement

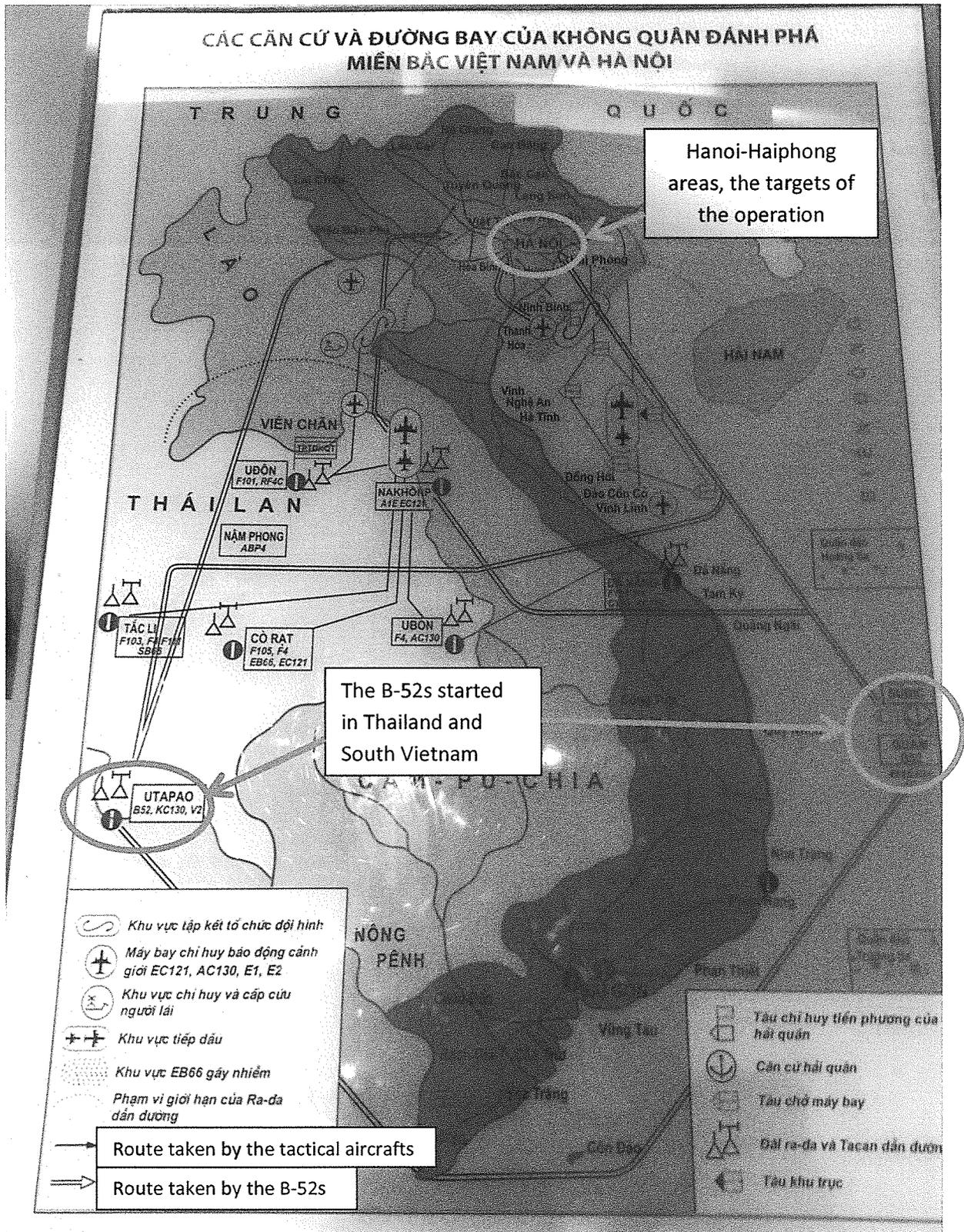
*The following excerpt is from the book “The Vietnam War Files: Uncovering the Secret History of Nixon’s Era” (2003) by historian Jeffrey Kimball. It shows the main points of the October draft treaty negotiated by the U.S. and Hanoi.*

“Key points included the following

- A declaration of U.S. respect for the independence, sovereignty, unity, and territorial integrity of Vietnam as recognized by the Geneva Agreements of 1954.
- A cease-fire throughout South Vietnam and an end to all American bombing, mining and military activities in North Vietnam within twenty-four hours of the signing.
- The total withdrawal of American and allied foreign troops and military personnel within sixty days, and the discontinuance of U.S. involvement and intervention in the internal affairs of South Vietnam. The return of captured and detained personnel of the parties, simultaneous with troop withdrawal.
- Replacement by the two South Vietnamese parties of worn-out munitions, weapons, and war matériel on a piece-by-piece basis.
- The affirmation of the right of the South Vietnamese people to self-determination, as defined by principles and steps that included: the formation of an administrative structure (the National Council of Reconciliation and Concord) to implement the agreements and organize general elections; internationally supervised elections; U.S. non-interference; consultation between the two South Vietnamese parties (the RVN and PRG) to form councils at lower levels, to reduce troops and arms, and to sign an agreement on internal matters concerning South Vietnam without foreign interference within three months of a cease-fire.
- A commitment to the peaceful reunification of Vietnam.
- The formation of an international four-partly joint military commission and a Vietnamese two-part joint military commission.
- The establishment of an international commission of control and supervision, and the convening of an international conference on Vietnam to guarantee the agreement.
- The establishment of a mutually beneficial relationship between the DRV and the United States, and U.S. agreement to make contributions to healing the wounds of war and achieving post-war reconstruction.
- Provisions regarding cease-fires and troop withdrawals in Laos and Cambodia and non-interference between the three countries of Indochina in the affairs of the other.”

This material could have been referred to in the essay itself.

Appendix 3 – Map of Operation Linebacker II



Map of U.S. detailed plan of Operation Linebacker II.

Image was taken by Anh Vo in the B-52 Victory Museum on July 20. Some key points were highlighted and translated by Anh Vo.

**Appendix 4 - Pictures of Kham Thien Street and Bach Mai hospital after being bombed.**



**Bach Mai Hospital after being bombed on December 22**



**Kham Thien Street after being bombed on December 26.**

These two images were taken in Vietnam National Military History Museum on July 20 2013 by Anh Vo. Bach Mai hospital and Kham Thien Street are always cited by Hanoi as American crimes against civilians.

## Appendix 5 – Loss of B-52s in Operation Linebacker II

The following table shows the number of B-52 bombers shot down during Operation Linebacker II according to a U.S. source and a Hanoi source. The U.S. number is from the article written by Walter J. Boyne (November 1997) in the Air Force Magazine. The number of Hanoi side is taken from the book “In remembrance of Hanoi – Dien Bien Phu on the skies 40 years ago” written by various authors from Air and Air Defense Force.

Date (December 1972)	Number of B-52 bombers shot down	
	U.S. source	Hanoi source
18	3	3
19	0	2
20	9	7
21	2	3
22	0	2
23	0	1
24	X	X
25	0	0
26	2	8
27	2	5
28	0	2
29	0	1
	<b>Total : 15</b>	<b>Total: 34</b>

**Number of B-52s shot down from American and Vietnamese sources**