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Title: The agreement on ending the war and restoring peace in Vietnam: The impact
of 'peace with honor' on the Nixon administration's foreign policy

Date: 2014

Originally published as: University of Chester MA dissertation

Example citation: Hughes, G. (2014). *The agreement on ending the war and
restoring peace in Vietnam: The impact of 'peace with honor' on the Nixon
administration's foreign policy*. (Unpublished master's thesis). University of Chester,
United Kingdom.

Version of item: Submitted version

Available at: <http://hdl.handle.net/10034/555966>

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Department of History and Archaeology

**The Agreement on Ending the War and Restoring Peace in Vietnam: The Impact of
'Peace with Honor' on the Nixon Administration's Foreign Policy**

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2013/2014

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Introduction

On January 23rd 1973, Richard Nixon announced: ‘we today have concluded an agreement to end the war and bring peace with honor in Vietnam and in Southeast Asia.’¹ This speech marked an end to American involvement in the Vietnam War and a final agreement of peace between the North and South regions of Vietnam. For America this announcement followed a tumultuous few decades. The ongoing war meant that the Nixon administration had to deal with immense defence spending, a vast number of casualties, reduced U.S. domestic support and constant attempts to get Hanoi and Saigon to negotiate in an attempt to end the war. The aim of this dissertation is to assess the significance of Nixon’s ‘peace with honor’ by evaluating the intentions of the Nixon administration’s foreign policy with regard to ending the Vietnam War. In addition, this dissertation will evaluate how far Nixon’s foreign policies achieved their aims. There were no easily available opportunities for Nixon to adopt in his foreign policy to end the war in Vietnam; as stated by Henry Kissinger in his memoirs: ‘by the time Nixon took office, the available choices in Vietnam were among unilateral withdrawal, escalation and Vietnamization. They all had unpalatable aspects.’² Therefore, as Kissinger suggested, no foreign policy initiatives were likely to gain unanimous support in an already well drawn-out war in Vietnam. The Nixon administration sought a solution that would end their involvement as soon as possible without destroying their efforts of the past few decades; it was hoped that continued effort for a peace agreement would help to diffuse future disputes in the region.

In the years following Nixon’s Presidential inauguration both North and South grew more intransigent with negotiations. Therefore, it became one of Nixon’s priorities to end

¹ Richard Nixon, ‘Address to the Nation Announcing Conclusion of an Agreement on Ending the War and Restoring Peace in Vietnam’, (January 23, 1973), Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, <<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=3808>>

² Henry Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War: A History of America’s Involvement in and Extrication from the Vietnam War*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003), p. 94

intransigence and speed up negotiations to get an agreement concluded. Nixon's 'peace with honor' is often judged alongside his foreign policies individually. Consequently, historians have argued that Nixon had produced neither peace nor honour from the war. For example, to assess the 1972 Linebacker II operation individually, it would seem that Nixon escalated the war and bombed a populous city, which seemed at odds with his desire for 'peace with honor.' However, this view fails to appreciate the intention of the bombing campaign. Therefore, this dissertation will address the intentions of Nixon's foreign policy and argue that the combination of Nixon's policies provided his best opportunity to achieve 'peace with honor' in Vietnam and for the U.S.

Following the peace agreement of the Vietnam War, historiographical debate about the Nixon administration's policies adapted to ongoing circumstances and increased availability of documents. Initially, historians who experienced the war first hand remained overtly critical. However, over time inherent limitations of the Nixon administration were soon recognised. Orthodox historiography originated in the mid-1970's and tended to be more critical of the Nixon administration's foreign policy albeit varied criticisms.³ David Halberstam argued that Nixon was not seeking peace but was instead trying to attain a victory in Vietnam. Halberstam claimed 'Nixon himself spoke of the fact that America had never lost a war, precisely the kind of speech a President needed to avoid if he wanted to disengage.'⁴ Jeffrey Kimball argued that Nixon's Vietnam policy was aimed at achieving a 'decent interval'⁵ before the war ended as to save embarrassment and potentially preserve international credibility. In a similar way to Kimball, Jussi Hanhimaki argued that there was no real 'peace with honor' and instead the final result was 'a temporary truce that allowed the United States to withdraw its remaining troops from South Vietnam and retrieve its prisoners

³ John Dumbrell, *Rethinking the Vietnam War*, (Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), p. 16

⁴ David Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest*, (New York: Ballantine Books, 1972), p. 664-5

⁵ Jeffrey Kimball, *Nixon's Vietnam War*, (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1998), p. 364

of war from Hanoi.⁶ There was also a common theme which surrounded the orthodox debate, this theme identified that Nixon's 'peace with honor' was a failure and consequently the Nixon administration sought a 'decent interval: an American withdrawal in return for a period of North Vietnamese restraint.'⁷

In the 1980's there was increased revisionist debate regarding Nixon's foreign policy goals.⁸ Revisionist historians have tried to vindicate orthodox interpretations and offer a more optimistic view of the Nixon administration's involvement with Vietnam. Guenter Lewy argued that 'Nixon's Linebacker bombing helped bring about a cease-fire'⁹ and thus a final agreement with both Vietnamese regions. Michael Lind argued that the Vietnam War was necessary and furthermore the escalation of the war in 1972 'was necessary in order to defend the credibility of the United States.'¹⁰ Post-revisionists have argued that the United States was fighting an unwinnable war and 'peace with honor' was unlikely.¹¹ Gabriel Kolko gave a more balanced view; he recognised the limited military options of both North and South Vietnam and argued: 'the growing limitations on the United States after 1969 made diplomacy increasingly the only area in which the administration could seek to attain its objectives without running into material and political constraints.'¹² However, despite this claim there is evidence to support the argument that military aspects were particularly instrumental in aiding diplomatic negotiations. For example, the North Vietnamese Spring

⁶ Jussi Hanhimaki, *The Flawed Architect: Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 229

⁷ Hanhimaki, *Flawed Architect*, p. 230

⁸ Dumbrell, *Vietnam*, p. 17

⁹ Dumbrell, *Vietnam*, p. 18

¹⁰ Michael Lind, *Vietnam: The Necessary War*, (New York: Touchstone, 1999), p. 39

¹¹ Gabriel Kolko, *Anatomy of War: Vietnam, the United States, and the Modern Historical Experience*, (London: Phoenix Press, 2001), p. 355

¹² Kolko, *Anatomy of War*, p. 355

Offensive from 1972 arguably failed due to U.S. aid and military campaigns such as Linebacker I.¹³

In contrast, this dissertation will aim to evaluate whether Nixon's foreign policy made a significant contribution to bringing about a conclusion to negotiations and ending American military involvement. In essence, did the Nixon administration achieve 'peace with honor' within their intended foreign policy goals during the period of the Vietnam War? To fully assess whether the Nixon administration succeeded in achieving their aims, this dissertation will evaluate the influence of 'peace with honor' within spurring on the negotiation process and more importantly within military campaigns such as Operation Linebacker II. In addition, it will be argued that Nixon's 'peace with honor' phrase was relevant to problems in the wider Cold War world with regard to the Soviet Union talks and the opening to China. This assessment will only review the foreign policy of the Nixon administration up to the Paris Peace Accords of 1973. Following the peace agreement it was arguably more difficult for Nixon to assist the South Vietnamese against violations from North Vietnam with major budget cuts on defence, initiated by the new Congress of 1973 and the consecutive Veto of the War Powers Resolution, October 24th 1973.

The first chapter of this dissertation will assess the introduction of Nixon's linkage into American foreign policy. Linkage was developed from Nixon and Kissinger's plan for a realistic approach to policy and diplomacy, or what was also known as *realpolitik*. Nixon's plan for 'realistic' politics implied a globalisation of policy meaning that problems within the world were related and should be dealt with more globally. Therefore, linkage politics was intended to help improve international relations and the Nixon administration hoped this might have a positive impact on Vietnam peace negotiations. The main themes of this

¹³ Orrin Schwab, *A Clash of Cultures: Civil-Military Relations During the Vietnam War*, (Westport: Praeger, 2006), p. 80

chapter include: the multiple intentions of linkage, the impact that Operation Linebacker II had on diplomatic relations and the achievements of linkage with regard to the Soviet Union and China. The foreign policy goals of the Nixon administration can be sourced from a variety of documents such as the four annual reports to Congress by President Nixon between 1970 and 1973 which indicate Nixon's 'structure of peace'. To consider the impact of linkage on the Vietnam War peace negotiations this chapter will evaluate Nixon's foreign policy reports; various memoranda and transcripts from 1969 to 1973 within the *Foreign Relations of the United States, U.S. Department of State*; as well as the memoirs from both President Nixon and National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger. These sources will give insight into how much of an impact linkage had according to the Nixon administration. The intention of this chapter is to argue that the ultimate objective of linkage politics was to help encourage peaceful international relations and détente with the Soviet Union. Furthermore, the prioritisation of diplomacy with ideologically opposed countries implied a more honourable international policy.

The second chapter will assess the Vietnamization policy, in an attempt to elicit its honourable purpose. Some war critics believed the best option for the Nixon administration was immediate unilateral withdrawal from Vietnam; however Nixon and Kissinger opposed this option because it represented a blatant betrayal... of our ally'¹⁴ and would give them 'no chance to survive on [their] own.'¹⁵ Vietnamization was essentially intended to toughen the South Vietnamese so that the U.S. could reduce their involvement; it was hoped that this would be useful in spurring on negotiations with the North. The problem was that U.S. withdrawal was imminent and Vietnamization was the only way to preserve leverage over the North Vietnamese with regard to negotiations. The themes of this chapter will include: the

¹⁴ Henry Kissinger, *White House Years*, (New York: Little Brown & Co., 1979), p. 286

¹⁵ Kissinger, *White House Years*, p. 286

need for the U.S. to strengthen the South Vietnamese self-reliance and self-determination, the impact that Vietnamization had on U.S. domestic support and finally the achievements of the policy. The origins and intentions of Vietnamization will be evaluated through National Security Study Memoranda (NSSM) 1 and 23 and the Nixon Doctrine speech from July 25th, 1969. Nixon's four foreign policy reports to Congress from 1970 to 1973 will also provide a majority of the evidence for this chapter. This chapter intends to argue that Vietnamization represented the honourable component of Nixon's 'peace with honor' as it attempted to strengthen the South Vietnamese; this attempt intended to make the South more reliant on their own self-defence and as a result they would not have to depend on other countries for support.

The final chapter of this dissertation will assess the impact of Operation Linebacker II in speeding up negotiations with North and South Vietnam and initiating a peace agreement. Following the failure of the 1972 October agreement, the leaders of both regions of Vietnam were increasingly intransigent with negotiations. The Nixon administration, who were growing tired of failing negotiations, believed the only way to make Hanoi and Saigon negotiate would be to apply leverage over them both. For North Vietnam, this leverage came in the form of the December 1972 Operation Linebacker II. This chapter will address the intended targets of the bombing campaign; the incentives for Hanoi and Saigon; the return of American prisoners of war (POWs) and the final peace agreement. The evidence for this chapter includes the memoirs of Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger and Nixon's annual foreign policy reports. However, most of the material used for this chapter will be taken from Volume IX of *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976, Vietnam, October 1972–January 1973*, which consists of memoranda and transcripts of conversation between members of the Nixon administration. This chapter will argue that while Operation

Linebacker II was not a particularly honourable strategy it managed to help influence the North Vietnamese to proceed with negotiations.

Chapter One – Nixon’s Linkage Policy

When Richard Nixon was elected President of the United States, he immediately recognised the need for a new approach to American foreign policy. After more than twenty years of American and Soviet commitment to Cold War ideologies, there was growing sentiment within the Nixon administration and the Soviet Union for improved international relations and détente. This feeling was further exacerbated by the ongoing war in Vietnam with supposed Communist opposition coming from the North Vietnamese. In addition, the United States had a similarly complicated relationship with Communist China, in 1949 when Mao Zedong initiated a Communist takeover of the Chinese government, the United States refused to recognise Mao’s new government and vetoed China from becoming a member of the United Nations. Nixon realised that a new stance on foreign policy was essential for peace within the world, in his memoirs Henry Kissinger proclaimed ‘our objective was to purge our foreign policy of all sentimentality.’¹⁶ The growing sentiment materialised from the Nixon administration in the form of realism or *realpolitik*; this indicated a more globalist view of the world and meant that the administration would deal with foreign policy more practically despite international ideologies or hostilities. In particular, Kissinger stated that realism indicated that ‘progress in superpower relations... had to be made on a broad front’ and thus ‘events in different parts of the world... were related to each other.’¹⁷

Nixon’s desire for improved international relations can be traced back to before he was elected President. In 1967, Nixon wrote an article for *Foreign Affairs* titled ‘Asia after Vietnam.’ The article outlined the importance of improved relations within the world and how this related to the war in Vietnam. To rebuild international relations within the world, Nixon argued that the West had to start working with the Communists to achieve long term

¹⁶ Henry Kissinger, *White House Years*, p. 191

¹⁷ Henry Kissinger, *White House Years*, p. 129

peace goals, he stated ‘for the long run, it means pulling China back into the world community - but as a great and progressing nation, not as the epicentre of world revolution.’¹⁸ Additionally, Nixon recognised the growing dissatisfaction with the war in Vietnam: ‘weary with war, disheartened with allies, disillusioned with aid, dismayed at domestic crises, many Americans are heeding the call of the new isolationism.’¹⁹ According to Nixon, it was this ‘new isolationism’ among Americans that would have an adverse effect on international relations; he believed that ‘to leave China forever outside the family of nations, there to nurture its fantasies, cherish its hates and threaten its neighbors.’²⁰ To isolate the Chinese would be disadvantageous to the improvement of world relations and Nixon inferred that an isolated Communist country served as a threat to its surrounding countries. The significance of Nixon’s statement lies in its allusion to the domino theory regarding Communist countries; this further outlined Nixon’s anti-Communist stance. Finally, Nixon concluded his article by stating that ‘the struggle for influence in the Third World is a three-way race among Moscow, Peking and the West’²¹ and born out from this was linkage policy, or what came to be known as triangular diplomacy, between the United States, the Soviet Union and the People’s Republic of China.

This chapter will argue that linkage policy still had its own part to play in spurring on negotiations with the North Vietnamese. However, it was not solely intended to bring an end to the Vietnam War and it was not as significant as the Nixon administration perceived.

Diplomatic manoeuvres from the Nixon administration were initiated to improve international relations, especially with Communist countries. This is important because even

¹⁸ Richard Nixon, ‘Asia After Vietnam’, Online by *Foreign Affairs*, 46, (October 1967)
<<http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/23927/richard-m-nixon/asia-after-viet-nam>>

¹⁹ Richard Nixon, ‘Asia After Vietnam’, Online by *Foreign Affairs*, 46, (October 1967)
<<http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/23927/richard-m-nixon/asia-after-viet-nam>>

²⁰ Richard Nixon, ‘Asia After Vietnam’, Online by *Foreign Affairs*, 46, (October 1967)
<<http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/23927/richard-m-nixon/asia-after-viet-nam>>

²¹ Richard Nixon, ‘Asia After Vietnam’, Online by *Foreign Affairs*, 46, (October 1967)
<<http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/23927/richard-m-nixon/asia-after-viet-nam>>

if these attempts were ineffectual in applying pressure on the North Vietnamese, it would show the world and the American public that Nixon could successfully negotiate with Communist countries to build peace without appeasing them. In essence, détente would provide an example to an international audience that diplomatic negotiations with the North Vietnamese were possible if they had been successful with the Soviet Union and China. To assess the impact of Nixon's linkage policy this chapter will consider the following themes: the multiple intentions of linkage; the impact of the Linebacker II Operation on the linkage policy; and the potential successes of triangular diplomacy with regard to Soviet and Chinese pressures on North Vietnam.

The intention and impact of the linkage policy has been widely debated within historiography. Orthodox historians, such as Fredrik Logevall and Andrew Preston, tend to overemphasise the intention of the United States in improving relations to end the Vietnam War. For example, Logevall and Preston stated: 'if America was to bring about "peace with honor" in Indochina, Nixon was going to need help from his new negotiating partners in Moscow and Beijing.'²² Additionally, Logevall and Preston argued that 'Nixon and Kissinger expected both Moscow and Beijing to apply pressure on Hanoi to settle the war at least partly along the lines of peace with honor.'²³ Revisionist historians have also argued that linkage was ineffective; however Jussi Hanhimaki stated that 'the opening to China and the launch of triangular diplomacy had... not translated into an obvious American advantage in the Vietnam peace talks'²⁴ due to the 1972 North Vietnamese Spring Offensive which 'exposed the inherent limits and weaknesses of triangular diplomacy.'²⁵ In contrast, post-revisionists such as Gabriel Kolko have argued that the cooling relations with the two Communist countries

²² Fredrik Logevall, Andrew Preston, *Nixon in the World: American Foreign Relations, 1969-1977*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 13

²³ Logevall, Preston, *Nixon in the World*, p. 13

²⁴ Hanhimaki, *The Flawed Architect*, p. 152

²⁵ Hanhimaki, *The Flawed Architect*, p. 202

were a bigger part of Nixon's foreign policy. Kolko argued that it was wrong to claim that the idea of linkage and triangular diplomacy were only initiated to end the war: 'to help mobilize the Russians and/or the Chinese to pressure the DRV into ending the war on American terms would exaggerate the meaning of the next phase of Washington's diplomacy, for both U.S. interests elsewhere in the world and domestic politics also defined its form.'²⁶ Kolko further suggested that 'triangular diplomacy on Vietnam seemed possible.'²⁷ Qiang Zhai, another post-revisionist historian, has argued that improved relations between the United States, China and the Soviet Union meant that 'policymakers in Hanoi had reason to worry that their two allies were susceptible to American pressures on Vietnam and that their support for the DRV might diminish if the war dragged on much longer.'²⁸

The growing disillusionment with the Vietnam conflict came from various parts of the globe; linkage was intended to reduce continued isolation of Communist countries and to encourage cooperation to build new structures of peace. In a report from the *U.S. News and World Report*, on September 16th 1968, Nixon stated: 'we must not forget China. We must always seek opportunities to talk with her, as with the U.S.S.R... we must not only watch for changes. We must seek to make changes.'²⁹ Nixon's statement brought the idea of cooperation with supposed enemies to the head of his foreign policy before he was elected President. Part of this cooperation was equated to the 'revolution in the technology of war';³⁰ Nixon argued that to ensure the world remained peaceful, ideologically opposed countries should work together to protect the prospects of peace. In the First Annual Foreign Policy

²⁶ Kolko, *Vietnam*, p. 418

²⁷ Kolko, *Vietnam*, p. 415

²⁸ Qiang Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars, 1950-1975*, (North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), p. 202

²⁹ Interview with Richard Nixon, (September 16, 1968), *U.S. News and World Report*, Online by BackIssues.com, <<http://backissues.com/issue/US-News-and-World-Report-September-16-1968>>

³⁰ Richard Nixon, 'First Annual Report to the Congress on United States Foreign Policy for the 1970's,' February 18, 1970, Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, <<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=2835>>

Report, of February 18th, 1970, Nixon stated that ‘new types of weapons present new dangers. Communist China has acquired thermonuclear weapons. Both the Soviet Union and the United States have acquired the ability to inflict unacceptable damage on the other, no matter which strikes first.’³¹ Therefore, Nixon’s statement indicated that linkage was partially intended to ensure such nuclear weapons would not be used against each other and to preserve peace among the powerful countries. As concluded in the First Annual Foreign Policy Report: ‘our attitude is clear-cut - a lasting peace will be impossible so long as some nations consider themselves the permanent enemies of others.’³²

The aims of triangular diplomacy were further indicated in Nixon’s 1971 Second Foreign Policy Report to Congress: ‘this Administration began with the conviction that a global structure of peace requires a strong but redefined American role. In other countries there was growing strength and autonomy. In our own there was nascent isolationism in reaction to overextension. In the light of these changed conditions, we could not continue on the old path.’³³ This report indicated a dual purpose for the idea of linkage as Nixon referred to the domestic dissent in America. Therefore, while there is evidence to suggest that linkage was intended to reduce the isolationism of Communist countries and bring an end to the Vietnam War, there is also evidence to suggest that this policy was aimed at rebuilding domestic support. If the Nixon administration could reconcile with Communist countries such as the Soviet Union and China, then the American public might be more likely to support Nixon in his effort for ‘peace with honour’ with the perceived Communist North Vietnamese.

³¹ Richard Nixon, ‘First Annual Report to the Congress on United States Foreign Policy for the 1970’s,’ February 18, 1970, Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, <<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=2835>>

³² Richard Nixon, ‘First Annual Report to the Congress on United States Foreign Policy for the 1970’s,’ February 18, 1970, Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, <<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=2835>>

³³ Richard Nixon, ‘Second Annual Report to the Congress on United States Foreign Policy’, February 25, 1971, Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, <<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=3324>>

However, there is no evidence to suggest that Nixon was appeasing the Communist superpowers; Nixon was particularly anti-Communist. Therefore, the opening to China would not be seen as a weakness of the Nixon administration because of Nixon's anti-Communist stance. Furthermore, it was hoped that ending the Vietnam War would help to rebuild domestic consensus in the United States. Nixon outlined his idea of 'peace with honour' directly to the American Congress to show how honourable his foreign policy could be; he stated that 'for our commitment to peace is most convincingly demonstrated in our willingness to negotiate our points of difference in a fair and business-like manner with the Communist countries. [...] We are under no illusions. We know that there are enduring ideological differences.'³⁴

By 1972 the American economy had increasingly deteriorated due to continued involvement in the Vietnam War. As stated in Nixon's Economic Report to Congress, from January 1972: 'the annual rate of national defense spending declined by \$25 billion from the fourth quarter of 1968 to the fourth quarter of 1971'³⁵ due to Vietnamization of the war; however this meant that the U.S. had 'urgent questions of unemployment, inflation, and the balance of payments.'³⁶ There is evidence to suggest that there were economic motives for triangular diplomacy especially with regards to China. The National Security Study Memorandum 149, of March 10th 1972, indicated the Nixon administration's desire for encouraging trade with the People's Republic of China.³⁷ This memorandum called for a study of 'ways in which the US Government can begin and facilitate an exchange of general

³⁴ Richard Nixon, 'First Annual Report to the Congress on United States Foreign Policy for the 1970's', February 18, 1970, Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, <<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=2835>>

³⁵ Economic Report of the President Transmitted to the Congress, (Washington: January 1972), *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/economic_reports/1972.pdf> p. 19

³⁶ Economic Report of the President Transmitted to the Congress, (Washington: January 1972), *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/economic_reports/1972.pdf> p. 20

³⁷ Economic Report of the President Transmitted to the Congress, (Washington: January 1972), *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/economic_reports/1972.pdf> p. 173

trade information and data between the US and the PRC. The possible uses of our third-country contact in this effort should be examined.³⁸ Furthermore, John Holdridge and Robert Hormats of the National Security Staff, indicated some of the U.S. objectives that were taken from the National Security Study: ‘our objectives should be to gradually improve trade relations, avoid giving the appearance of “rug merchants” intent on pushing our products, recognize that the PRC will require balance in trade, and gauge our actions based on consideration of PRC receptivity.’³⁹ This additional evidence demonstrated Nixon’s desire to normalise relations with the People’s Republic of China in an attempt to tie together the Chinese and U.S. markets, this would certainly be advantageous to both countries especially for the U.S. since the continued involvement in an expensive war had slowed their economy.

For this chapter Operation Linebacker II, 1972, (or the Christmas Bombings) served as a case study to examine the impact of Nixon’s linkage on diplomatic relations in the Vietnam War. When negotiations stalemated between the North and South Vietnamese, the Nixon administration returned to military operations in an attempt to resume serious negotiations. Meanwhile, Nixon was trying to normalize relations with China and simultaneously the Soviet Union and U.S. were pressing for détente. However, there was hesitation about Operation Linebacker II as it was believed it might have a negative impact on diplomacy and linkage with the Communist countries. For example, the President’s Deputy Assistant Haig sent a memo to Henry Kissinger stating that he ‘must give most careful consideration to messages which should be given to the Soviet Union and the People’s Republic of China. In the case of the Soviet Union, we should stress the themes of

³⁸ National Security Study Memorandum 149, Washington, March 10, 1972, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976, Volume XVII, China, 1969–1972*, <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v17/d211>>

³⁹ Memorandum From John H. Holdridge and Robert Hormats of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), March 30, 1972, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976, Volume XVII, China, 1969–1972*, <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v17/d217>>

our desire to settle...’⁴⁰ Additionally, Haig stated that due to Kissinger’s diplomatic efforts with China, he would have to be ‘even more delicate especially in the context of your scheduled trip to China, the increased activity in the buffer zone and the importance of China’s at least having our rationale covering the reason for the breakdown.’⁴¹ This was important as it showed how the Americans perceived the significance of Soviet and Chinese influence over the North Vietnamese. However, the administration had few options left to convince both Vietnamese sides to negotiate for a peace agreement. Following the failure of the 1968 Tet Offensive, it was deemed unlikely that a military solution could be reached in the region. A CIA study from September 1969, indicated that in the Paris negotiations ‘a new political program and new political organizations have been introduced to help shift the struggle from the military to the political realm.’⁴²

One of the reasons that Operation Linebacker II was significant can be attributed to the ‘accidental’ damage caused by the American Air Force to ships owned by the Soviet Union, China, Poland and France, when the bombings were initiated above the 20th parallel.⁴³ The importance of this lay in the response of China and the Soviet Union to the destruction of their ships. A message from Richard T. Kennedy of the National Security Staff stated that ‘we have received protests from the Soviets and the Poles for damage to ships in Haiphong

⁴⁰ Memorandum From the President’s Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Haig) to the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), Washington, December 13, 1972, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume IX, Vietnam, October 1972–January 1973*, <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v09/d173>>

⁴¹ Memorandum From the President’s Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Haig) to the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), Washington, December 13, 1972, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume IX, Vietnam, October 1972–January 1973*, <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v09/d173>>

⁴² Memorandum From John Holdridge of the Operations Staff of the National Security Council to the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), Washington, September 30, 1969, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976, Volume VI, Vietnam, January 1969–July 1970*, <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v06/d128>>

⁴³ Transcript of a Telephone Conversation Between the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Moorer) and the Deputy Commander, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (Vogt), December 22, 1972, 8:26 a.m., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume IX, Vietnam, October 1972–January 1973*, <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v09/d217>>

Harbor. The Soviet protest was relatively low key and received little publicity.’⁴⁴

Furthermore, two days later in a conversation between the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Thomas Moorer, and the Deputy Commander of U.S. Military Assistance, John Vogt; Moorer expressed his surprise that the Americans had destroyed Russian ships but ‘the funny part about it is the Russians aren’t saying one word.’⁴⁵ Kissinger stated in conversation with H. R. Haldeman, Assistant to the President, that the reaction from the North Vietnamese, the Soviets and the Chinese were all fairly subdued, he claimed that the North Vietnamese ‘came in and just read a statement denouncing the bombings... at the end of that statement, they proposed another meeting for Saturday. So far, the Chinese reaction has been very mild. The Soviet reaction has been very mild. We may get an agreement out of this.’⁴⁶ The reactions were significant as the Soviets and Chinese lacked any real severe reaction to ‘accidental’ bombings of their own ships. The evidence suggested that the lack of retaliation was due to the influence of Nixon’s linkage policy and thus his desire to improve relations with Communist countries may have had an effect. However, the lack of protest from the Soviets and Chinese might also have been due to a desire to avoid international inquiry about why their ships were in the Haiphong Harbor at the time.

Further evidence to suggest linkage might have helped Nixon’s chances of spurring on negotiations with the North Vietnamese in spite of Operation Linebacker II comes from the PRC. On December 29th, 1972, toward the final bombings, the Chairman of the

⁴⁴ Backchannel Message From Richard T. Kennedy of the National Security Council Staff to the President’s Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Haig) in Saigon, December 20, 1972, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume IX, Vietnam, October 1972–January 1973*, <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v09/d207>>

⁴⁵ Transcript of a Telephone Conversation Between the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Moorer) and the Deputy Commander, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (Vogt), December 22, 1972, 8:26 a.m., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume IX, Vietnam, October 1972–January 1973*, <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v09/d217>>

⁴⁶ Conversation Among President Nixon, the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), and the Assistant to the President (Haldeman), December 20, 1972, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume IX, Vietnam, October 1972–January 1973*, <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v09/d209>>

Communist Party of China, Mao Zedong advised Nguyen Thi Binh, one of the Vietnamese Communist leaders, to proceed with negotiations alongside America and the South Vietnamese. Mao explained that North Vietnam could ‘achieve a certain degree of normalization with the Americans.’⁴⁷ As stated by Henry Kissinger: ‘the Chinese made a protest about the ship we hit and did about the absolute minimum that they could do—they protested orally in Paris not even in our channel—and then when our man there asked them whether they had a written note, they said oh no, no we said all we are going to say and they said that our air operations threaten China security.’⁴⁸ It was important for the Chinese to remain on better terms with the Americans than the North Vietnamese as the PRC wanted to be an internationally recognised country. Therefore, since it was the U.S. that vetoed their admission to the United Nations, to normalise relations with America would certainly help the PRC achieve their goal.

Orthodox historians, such as Fredrik Logevall and Andrew Preston, have argued that both the Soviet Union and the People’s Republic of China were unwilling to discuss negotiations with the North Vietnamese. Logevall and Preston claimed that despite the efforts of Nixon’s linkage policy, it ‘turned out that Soviets and Chinese were not particularly willing to apply pressure to the North Vietnamese.’⁴⁹ However, there is available evidence from both powers which suggested that the Chinese and the Soviets did voice their opinions to the North Vietnamese to proceed with negotiations, but only as advice not as instruction. As Raymond Garthoff argued: ‘the Nixon administration, to its credit, never believed that the Soviet Union or China was responsible for and in direct command or control of the North

⁴⁷ Discussion Between Mao Zedong and Nguyen Thi Binh, Beijing, December 29, 1972, *Wilson Center – Digital Archive*, <<http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113114>>

⁴⁸ Transcript of a Telephone Conversation Between President Nixon and the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), December 23, 1972, 12:50 p.m., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume IX, Vietnam, October 1972–January 1973*, <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v09/d221>>

⁴⁹ Logevall, Preston, *Nixon in the World*, p. 13

Vietnamese... this clarity of perception permitted the administration to see – and to pursue – possibilities for triangular diplomacy that had not previously been adequately recognized at the policy level.’⁵⁰ However, Qiang Zhai has argued that because China and the Soviet Union both displayed interest in renewing relations with America; ‘policymakers in Hanoi had reason to worry that their two allies were susceptible to American pressures on Vietnam and that their support for the DRV might diminish if the war dragged on much longer.’⁵¹

In Kissinger’s meetings with the Soviet Ambassador to the U.S., Anatoly Dobrynin, it was further explained that the Soviet Union did not have the authority over the North Vietnamese to force an agreement. Raymond Garthoff argued that ‘Dobrynin protested that Moscow had only limited influence with the leaders in Hanoi, but promised that the Soviet leaders would do what they could to forward the American negotiating proposals.’⁵² Therefore, Garthoff suggested, despite limited influence, Moscow was more than willing to apply pressure onto North Vietnam. There is further evidence for this argument in a message between Al Haig and Henry Kissinger, Haig stated that he ‘told Dobrynin that quite frankly while we had no objective time pressure to settle that patience was wearing thin. He urged me to provide him with a prompt readout of the results of this afternoon’s meeting, stating that Moscow was using its good offices to bring Hanoi in line.’⁵³ The evidence therefore suggests that by linking different issues, Nixon was able to take advantage of any potential influence that the Soviets and Chinese had over Hanoi. This influence and desire for improved relations

⁵⁰ Raymond Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan*, (Washington: Brookings Institution, 1994), p. 281

⁵¹ Zhai, *China and the Vietnam War*, p. 202

⁵² Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation*, p. 283

⁵³ Message From the President’s Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Haig) to the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) in Paris, Washington, December 12, 1972, 1905Z, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume IX, Vietnam, October 1972–January 1973*, <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v09/d162>>

between the three countries meant that they could not isolate the problems that were occurring in North Vietnam as they were all involved in some way.

Further evidence of Soviet pressures comes from conversations between Nixon and Kissinger in late 1972. Nixon stated that it was disputes between the Chinese and the Soviets that caused the Communist superpowers to pressure the North Vietnamese into negotiation rather than actually defend them; he argued that ‘they [the Soviets] hate the Chinese. The Chinese want to get it over, because they have other fish to fry with us. But neither of them can get caught not helping the North Vietnamese as long as it goes on.’⁵⁴ Therefore, the evidence supports the argument that the combination of improved relations between America and the Communist countries and the deteriorating relationship between the Chinese and the Soviets had an influence on negotiations with the North Vietnamese. However, this should not be overstated; diplomatic negotiations between the three countries could not play a major part in the peace process due to limited influence that the Communist superpowers had over the North Vietnamese. Nixon stated, with regard to pressuring Hanoi to negotiate: ‘there’s still a chance for a settlement. The Russians are pressuring them. The Chinese, maybe. But, the main point is what is pressuring them the most is the fact that the military situation for them is damn bad. It’s bad and critical.’⁵⁵

The Soviet Union was not alone in encouraging the North Vietnamese to proceed with negotiations. There is evidence to suggest that the People’s Republic of China also attempted to persuade the North Vietnamese to settle an agreement with America. On July 12th 1972,

⁵⁴ Conversation Among President Nixon, Vice President Agnew, and the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), Washington, December 16, 1972, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume IX, Vietnam, October 1972–January 1973*, <<http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v09/d181>>

⁵⁵ Conversation Among President Nixon, Vice President Agnew, and the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), Washington, December 16, 1972, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume IX, Vietnam, October 1972–January 1973*, <<http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v09/d181>>

Zhou Enlai, the Premier of the People's Republic of China met with Le Duc Tho in Beijing to advise the Democratic Republic of Vietnam to negotiate. Zhou stated that 'on the one hand, it is necessary to prepare for fighting. On the other hand, you have to negotiate.'⁵⁶ Zhou attempted to convince Tho that the North Vietnamese could drop their requirement for Nguyen Van Thieu to be removed as President of South Vietnam. Additionally, Zhou stated that to recognise Thieu as part of future coalition government would have meant that 'the US will see that Thieu is sharing power in that government, and therefore, find it easier to accept a political solution.'⁵⁷ However, in this discussion the limits of Chinese influence were present, as Zhou stated: 'of course how to solve this problem is your job. However, as comrades, we would like to refer to our experience.'⁵⁸ The evidence from the Chinese officials acknowledged the limited influence they had over the North Vietnamese. Therefore, Zhou's statement supports the argument that advice from the People's Republic of China was not instructive and certainly would have no instant impact on the North Vietnamese.

However, on October 8th 1972, in negotiations with Kissinger, Le Duc Tho did exactly what Zhou had advised and dropped the requirement of the removal of Thieu. In this discussion Tho laid out new terms for negotiations: 'in this new proposal we do not demand the formation of a Government of National Concord before the ceasefire, but we will let the two South Vietnamese do this work, three months after the ceasefire at the latest. And this is what you yourself have proposed, the same proposal.'⁵⁹ The evidence from the October negotiations suggested a parallel between the recommendations of the Chinese Premier and

⁵⁶ Discussion Between Zhou Enlai and Le Duc Tho, Beijing, July 12, 1972, *Wilson Center – Digital Archive*, <<http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113113>>

⁵⁷ Discussion Between Zhou Enlai and Le Duc Tho, Beijing, July 12, 1972, *Wilson Center – Digital Archive*, <<http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113113>>

⁵⁸ Discussion Between Zhou Enlai and Le Duc Tho, Beijing, July 12, 1972, *Wilson Center – Digital Archive*, <<http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113113>>

⁵⁹ Memorandum of Conversation, Paris, October 8, 1972, 10:30 a.m.–7:38 p.m., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume IX, Vietnam, October 1972–January 1973*, <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v09/d1>>

the North Vietnamese revised proposals. Therefore this supports the argument that despite limited influence, the advice from the PRC might have had a limited impact on Hanoi. However, as previously quoted in this chapter, Nixon outlined the dire state of the North Vietnamese military so Chinese pressures should not be overstated. However, there is further evidence to suggest that the People's Republic of China continued their advice to the North Vietnamese to proceed with negotiations. In a conversation that coincided with the end of Operation Linebacker II, Zhou told Vietnamese Communist political leader Truong Chinh that 'it seems that Nixon is truly planning to leave [Vietnam]. Therefore, this time it is necessary to negotiate [with them] seriously, and the goal is to reach an agreement. Of course, you also need to prepare [for the possibility] that the negotiations will not result in an agreement, and that some setbacks may occur before [the agreement is finally reached].'⁶⁰ This evidence further suggested that the Chinese were determined to get an agreement reached in Vietnam.

It would be an overstatement to claim that linkage politics and improved international relations was a decisive factor in the North Vietnamese decision to proceed to an agreement. However, it would be too limited to claim that linkage politics had no effect on diplomacy and that the Soviet Union and Chinese were unwilling to increase pressure over the North Vietnamese, as argued by Fredrik Logevall and Andrew Preston. Furthermore, as Qiang Zhai argued 'despite the North Vietnamese claim that they had not been affected by the changes in Sino-American and Soviet-American relations, the unfolding U.S. rapprochement with China and the Soviet Union undermined Hanoi's interests. The limitations of both Soviet and Chinese aid seriously constrained Hanoi's approach to Washington.'⁶¹

⁶⁰ Discussion Between Zhou Enlai and Truong Chinh, Beijing, 8:40 pm, 31 December 1972, *Wilson Center – Digital Archive*, <<http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113115>>

⁶¹ Zhai, *China*, p. 205

Nixon's Fourth Annual Report to Congress on United States Foreign Policy from 1973 is particularly indicative of the success of triangular diplomacy and linkage. One of the main achievements of Nixon's foreign policy given in his report was the opening to China and reconciliations of relations. Nixon stated:

Three years of careful groundwork produced an historic turning point in our relations with the People's Republic of China. My conversations with Chinese leaders in February 1972 re-established contact between the world's most powerful and the world's most populous countries, thereby transforming the postwar landscape. The journey to Peking launched a process with immense potential for the betterment of our peoples and the building of peace in Asia and the world. Since then we have moved to concrete measures which are improving relations and creating more positive conditions in the region. China is becoming fully engaged with us and the world. The process is not inexorable, however. Both countries will have to continue to exercise restraint and contribute to a more stable environment.⁶²

The second achievement stated by Nixon: 'the attainment of an honorable settlement in Vietnam was the most satisfying development of this past year.'⁶³ Nixon explained that this achievement was due to American 'firmness in Southeast Asia and the maintenance of durable partnerships with ... other Asian [countries] ... made it possible for us to reach out to other adversaries.'⁶⁴ According to Nixon, this had two important consequences for international peace relations: 'The People's Republic of China has become more fully engaged in the world scene; much more than before, it is making its contributions to shaping the international order'⁶⁵ and now the Nixon administration 'would work with Moscow

⁶² Richard Nixon, 'Fourth Annual Report to the Congress on United States Foreign Policy', May 3, 1973, Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, <<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=3832>>

⁶³ Richard Nixon, 'Fourth Annual Report to the Congress on United States Foreign Policy', May 3, 1973, Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, <<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=3832>>

⁶⁴ Richard Nixon, 'Fourth Annual Report to the Congress on United States Foreign Policy', May 3, 1973, Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, <<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=3832>>

⁶⁵ Richard Nixon, 'Fourth Annual Report to the Congress on United States Foreign Policy', May 3, 1973, Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, <<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=3832>>

across a broad front, believing that progress in one area would induce progress in others.’⁶⁶ Nixon’s report indicated the importance given to the success of the linkage policy by his administration. As Gabriel Kolko argued it was the combination of Nixon’s ‘three-pronged strategy of diplomacy over the head of the DRV, threats of escalation, and Vietnamization, each of which aided the other by buying time’⁶⁷ that helped to secure a final agreement with the North Vietnamese. However, there were other factors involved in Nixon’s ‘peace with honour’.

To conclude, as Nixon stated in his final 1973 Foreign Policy Report: ‘our approach to the Vietnam conflict and our shaping of a new foreign policy were inextricably linked.’⁶⁸ This chapter has argued that the linkage policy was a significant part of Nixon’s ‘peace with honour’ and it certainly played a part in spurring on negotiations. Firstly, this chapter has shown that linkage had multiple intentions: it was designed to help encourage negotiations with the North Vietnamese; to encourage peaceful relations around the globe; to end potential threats of nuclear attacks by Communist superpowers; and to increase domestic support in the U.S. for American foreign policy. With regards to the historiographical debate, this chapter has opposed Logevall and Preston’s argument; as it appeared too simplistic by assuming that triangular diplomacy was only initiated for reasons to do with the Vietnam War. Secondly, this chapter used the case study of Operation Linebacker 1972 to assess whether bombing negatively affected linkage politics. Hanhimaki argued that linkage had no real benefit for the Nixon administration and limited the intention of triangular diplomacy to the United States attempting to end the war simply through the supply lines of the Soviet Union and China.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Richard Nixon, ‘Fourth Annual Report to the Congress on United States Foreign Policy’, May 3, 1973, Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, <<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=3832>>

⁶⁷ Hanhimaki, *The Flawed Architect*, p. 230

⁶⁸ Richard Nixon, ‘Fourth Annual Report to the Congress on United States Foreign Policy’, May 3, 1973, Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, <<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=3832>>

⁶⁹ Hanhimaki, *The Flawed Architect*, p. 152

However, evidence suggested that due to subdued reactions of the Communist superpowers when U.S. bombing accidentally destroyed Soviet and Chinese property, the Communists were still supportive of improved relations with America. This evidence suggests that without triangular diplomacy and the desire of both Americans and Soviets for détente, such reactions would not have been previously possible. Therefore, linkage helped to spur on negotiations through improved relations with Communist powers. The third part of this chapter was aimed at emphasising that despite the Vietnam War not being a Cold War battle and aid being supplied to North Vietnam from the Communist countries, there is evidence that displays the Soviets and Chinese advising North Vietnam to reach an agreement with the U.S. This chapter does not attempt to argue that the Soviets and Chinese were decisive in pressuring the North Vietnamese, as both countries admitted they had limited influence. However, the example of the Premier of the People's Republic of China advice to the North Vietnamese suggested that they may have played in part in spurring on negotiations. In essence the impact of linkage and triangular diplomacy should not be over exaggerated, there is evidence to support the argument that the Communist powers had an impact on the North Vietnamese but it was neither the sole intention of the policy nor the only influence on Hanoi to proceed with peace agreements.

Chapter Two: The Vietnamization Strategy

The strategy of Vietnamization was designed to strengthen the defence of the South Vietnamese forces in order to allow American troops to be withdrawn from Vietnam. As explained by Nixon, this was not a particularly new strategy in Vietnam foreign policy; in the same vein Lyndon Johnson's administration thought up 'de-Americanisation' which similarly shifted the responsibility onto the South Vietnamese.⁷⁰ However, it was not until Nixon took office that the strategy was fully committed to. The growing disillusionment with the Vietnam War amongst the American people was one of the leading incentives for Nixon to go ahead with Vietnamization; it was hoped that this strategy would result in continual withdrawals of American troops and a reduction in American losses of life. Henry Kissinger stated that 'the new Nixon administration started studying the withdrawals of American troops for two reasons: to win public support and give Hanoi an incentive to negotiate seriously by enhancing the staying power of our remaining forces.'⁷¹ Therefore, while U.S. withdrawals would reduce leverage over the North Vietnamese in negotiations; it was hoped that Vietnamization would be effective in strengthening South Vietnamese forces. Furthermore, the intention was that increased strength of South Vietnam would make up for reduced U.S. presence and would provide an ideal substitute for U.S. leverage.

The strategy for Vietnamization of the war in Nixon's first term as President evolved from early 1969 National Security Memoranda and Nixon's speech held in Guam on July 25th 1969, which informally outlined the plans for the 'Nixon Doctrine'. National Security Study Memorandum 1, from January 21st 1969, by Henry Kissinger called for the Nixon administration to evaluate 'in what different ways (including innovations in organization) might U.S. force-levels be reduced to various levels, while minimizing impact on combat

⁷⁰ Richard M. Nixon, *The Memoirs of Richard Nixon*, (London: Arrow Publishing, 1979), p. 274

⁷¹ Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War*, p. 81

capability?’⁷² On April 10th 1969, National Security Study Memorandum 36 required the Nixon administration to draw up a timetable that would ‘be directed toward the progressive transfer to the South Vietnamese of the fighting effort with the US and other TCCs increasingly in support roles.’⁷³ The evidence suggested that the Nixon administration was unwilling to abandon its South Vietnamese allies and reduction of U.S. troop levels was dependent on the capability of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN).

Nixon’s speech in Guam, from July 25th 1969, informally announced to an international audience the intention of American foreign policy and outlined the strategy of Vietnamization. Nixon stated that regarding military defence of countries ‘the United States is going to encourage and has a right to expect that this problem will be increasingly handled by, and the responsibility for it taken by, the Asian nations themselves.’⁷⁴ He added that ‘from my preliminary conversations with several Asian leaders over the past few months that they are going to be willing to undertake this responsibility. It will not be easy.’⁷⁵ This speech was significant as it outlined the reasons for the Vietnamization of the war. Nixon believed that the South Vietnamese needed to have more responsibility to ultimately make themselves a stronger nation, he argued that ‘if the United States just continues down the road of responding to requests for assistance, of assuming the primary responsibility for defending these countries when they have internal problems or external problems, they are never going to take care of themselves.’⁷⁶ In other words, if the South Vietnamese remained reliant on the

⁷² National Security Study Memorandum 1, (January 21, 1969), *Federation of American Scientists*, <http://fas.org/irp/offdocs/nssm-nixon/nssm_001.pdf>

⁷³ National Security Study Memorandum 36, (April 10, 1969), *Federation of American Scientists*, <http://fas.org/irp/offdocs/nssm-nixon/nssm_036.pdf>

⁷⁴ Richard Nixon, ‘Informal Remarks in Guam With Newsmen,’ (July 25, 1969), Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, <<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=2140>>

⁷⁵ Richard Nixon, ‘Informal Remarks in Guam With Newsmen,’ (July 25, 1969), Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, <<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=2140>>

⁷⁶ Richard Nixon, ‘Informal Remarks in Guam With Newsmen,’ (July 25, 1969), Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, <<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=2140>>

U.S. they would never have the strength to fight off future aggressors when American troops were fully withdrawn from Vietnam.

The intended purpose and the eventual impact of Vietnamization have been widely debated by historians. The more orthodox historians tend to be critical of most of Nixon's Vietnam policies and they have argued that Vietnamization was not a viable solution to ending the Vietnam War. For example, Lien-Hang T. Nguyen believed that the only real purpose of Vietnamization was 'staving off public disapproval with the war'⁷⁷ and argued that Nixon was just trying to 'win'⁷⁸ the war. Similarly, Jussi Hanhimaki argued that Nixon's strategy had little impact on his foreign policy ambitions and stated 'Vietnamization did little to achieve peace with honour.'⁷⁹ Some historians have rather extremely claimed that the U.S. was trying to prolong the war with this strategy for example, Rocky M. Mirza argued that 'Vietnamization was another lie to continue the Vietnam War.'⁸⁰ Revisionists, however, have argued that some gains were made by the Vietnamization strategy. Guenter Lewy argued that 'there is general agreement that during these years of American disengagement the effectiveness of RVNAF increased significantly.'⁸¹ Similarly, George C. Herring argued that 'Vietnamization was in full swing by early 1970, and most observers agreed that significant gains had been made.'⁸²

This chapter will argue that the strategy of Vietnamization was one of the aspects of Nixon's 'peace with honour' which attempted to spur on negotiations with the North Vietnamese. It can be argued that this strategy was particularly 'honourable' because the

⁷⁷ Lien-Hang T. Nguyen, *Hanoi's War: An International History of the War for Peace in Vietnam*, (North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), p. 132

⁷⁸ Nguyen, *Hanoi's War*, p. 132

⁷⁹ Jussi Hanhimaki, 'Foreign Policy Overview', in Melvin Small, *A Companion to Richard M. Nixon*, (Chichester: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2011) p. 359

⁸⁰ Rocky M. Mirza, *American Invasions: Canada to Afghanistan, 1775-2010*, (Indiana: Trafford Publishing, 2010), p. 220

⁸¹ Guenter Lewy, *America In Vietnam*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 167

⁸² George C. Herring, *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam: 1950-1975*, 4th ed., (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979), p. 226

Nixon administration did not impulsively initiate unilateral withdrawal of American forces in Vietnam; instead they attempted to increase the security and defence of the South Vietnamese. Therefore, if their plan succeeded the North Vietnamese might be more inclined to fully participate in negotiations. As indicated by Nixon on February 18th 1970: ‘what alternative strategies are open to the enemy in the face of continued allied success? If they choose to conduct a protracted, low-intensity war, could they simply wait out U.S. withdrawals and then, through reinvigorated efforts, seize the initiative again and defeat the South Vietnamese forces?’⁸³ Therefore, this chapter will argue that Vietnamization was the best and most honourable strategy for the Nixon administration. First of all, this strategy helped with U.S. domestic support due to increased troop withdrawals, lower casualty rates and lower war expenses. Secondly, the strategy was intended to spur on negotiations with the North Vietnamese by making the South more self-reliant and self-determined; it was hoped that this would make them stronger so that they would not have to rely on other countries for defence in the future. Thirdly, there are examples that suggested Vietnamization succeeded, such as reports from Sir Robert Thompson and the increased role of the ARVN especially with regard to the Lam Son 719 Operation 1971. As argued by Henry Kissinger, Nixon’s foreign policy was intended as a ‘dual-track strategy of Vietnamization and negotiations. And it made the point that Vietnamization offered a prospect of honourable disengagement that was not hostage to the other side’s cooperation.’⁸⁴

The policy of Vietnamization, if it was to succeed, would have political benefits for the Nixon administration. If the American troops could successfully transfer the burden of the war to the South Vietnamese, whilst not reducing the strength of the combined military, then

⁸³ Richard Nixon, ‘First Annual Report to the Congress on United States Foreign Policy for the 1970’s,’ February 18, 1970, Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, <<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=2835>>

⁸⁴ Kissinger, *White House Years*, p. 306

the Nixon administration could proceed with American withdrawal without any detrimental effect on the war effort. The increased troop withdrawal, it was hoped, would thus quieten or even slightly reduce domestic opposition in the U.S, as Kissinger stated ‘troop cuts poulticed public sores at home.’⁸⁵ Vietnamization meant that troop withdrawals would be gradual dependent upon the strength of South Vietnamese forces. The Nixon administration did not want to withdraw unilaterally because it would severely weaken the South Vietnamese and as Kissinger explained there was still a ‘lingering hope that Hanoi might at some point negotiate.’⁸⁶ Melvin Laird, one of the major architects of Vietnamization, had explained his ‘major concern was to get the United States out of Vietnam before we lost too much domestic support. But he wanted to do so without a collapse of the South Vietnamese.’⁸⁷ Once again, Vietnamization meant that the Nixon administration would be walking a tightrope between losing domestic support and losing the South Vietnamese to the opposition.

As Nixon explained in his foreign policy, many critics of the war argued that the Nixon administration should either ‘escalate in an attempt to impose a military solution on the battlefield’⁸⁸ or ‘liquidate our presence immediately, cut our losses, and leave the South Vietnamese on their own.’⁸⁹ However, neither of these actions presented Nixon’s administration with the peace or honour that was desired. Nixon therefore argued that Vietnamization was his best chance for success; he explained ‘in many respects Vietnamization would be far more damaging to the Communists than an escalation that, as Thompson had pointed out, would not solve the basic problem of South Vietnam

⁸⁵ Kissinger, *White House Years*, p. 475

⁸⁶ Kissinger, *White House Years*, p. 288

⁸⁷ Kissinger, *White House Years*, p. 262

⁸⁸ Richard Nixon, ‘Second Annual Report to the Congress on United States Foreign Policy’, February 25, 1971, Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, <<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=3324>>

⁸⁹ Richard Nixon, ‘Second Annual Report to the Congress on United States Foreign Policy’, February 25, 1971, Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, <<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=3324>>

preparedness, and that would stir up serious domestic problems in America.⁹⁰ Nixon's statement supports the argument that Vietnamization provided one of the best opportunities to keep the American public on side. On November 3rd 1969, Nixon made his 'Silent Majority' speech calling on those who were not against the war to express their support. However, the speech indicated that the Americans 'were going to continue fighting until the Communists agreed to negotiate a fair and honourable or until the South Vietnamese were able to defend themselves on their own.'⁹¹ The significance of this speech lay in the response of the American public and the increased support for Nixon's Vietnam policy. An article from the *New York Times* on November 5th 1969, stated: 'a Gallup telephone poll indicated that 77 per cent of those who had listened to the speech last night favoured Mr. Nixon's policies.'⁹²

Successful Vietnamization of the war would hopefully result in increased withdrawals of Americans. Nixon anticipated that the American public would be convinced further that he was serious about negotiations by withdrawing more troops. In this way, the blame for the continuation of the war would be shifted to the North Vietnamese and Nixon hoped that criticism of his policies would be redirected. For example, in October 1970 Nixon made two announcements: 'in addition to a cease-fire in place throughout Indochina... I announced that 40,000 more troops would be withdrawn by Christmas... these two moves went so far toward removing the obstacles to a settlement that they effectively silenced the domestic antiwar movement by placing the burden squarely on the North Vietnamese.'⁹³ These announcements meant that it would be harder for domestic opposition in the U.S. to criticise Nixon as the burden of ending the war would be placed on the North Vietnamese, thus supporting the argument that Vietnamization was the best option for the U.S.

⁹⁰ Nixon, *Memoirs*, p. 405

⁹¹ Nixon, *Memoirs*, p. 409

⁹² 'Nixon Declares "Silent Majority" Backs His Speech', (November 5, 1969), *New York Times Archive*, <<http://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1969/11/05/89382953.html>> p. 1,11

⁹³ Nixon, *Memoirs*, p. 469

There were other ways in which Vietnamization could help reduce criticism of the Nixon administration. Transferring the burden of the war onto the South Vietnamese would mean that U.S. casualty rates would drop as American troops could be withdrawn. This argument can be supported by the significant decrease in U.S. casualty rates from 1969 to 1972. In 1969, when Nixon was elected President, casualty rates stood at 11,780 but by 1972 this number had decreased to 759.⁹⁴ In addition, the U.S. economy was suffering partly due to the ongoing war in Vietnam, if the U.S. could transfer the burden of the war to the South Vietnamese then their expenses would also be reduced. In Nixon's 1971 Economic Report to Congress it was stated that there was a transition 'from a wartime to a peacetime economy and from a higher to a lower rate of inflation, [and this] would inevitably be accompanied by some decline in output and rise in unemployment.'⁹⁵ As stated by Kissinger in a memorandum to Nixon: 'Vietnamization has worked two pressures on Hanoi to negotiate a settlement, while buying time at home with the steady decline of U.S. forces, casualties, and expenses.'⁹⁶

There were some doubts within the Nixon administration on whether troop withdrawals would be disadvantageous to negotiations. Most of the doubts came from Henry Kissinger who argued that 'the more automatic our withdrawal, the less useful it was as a bargaining weapon.'⁹⁷ Therefore, the Nixon administration attempted to balance their strategy between leverage over the North Vietnamese and domestic support; Kissinger argued 'our present strategy was trying to walk a fine line... between withdrawing too fast to convince

⁹⁴ Statistical Information about Fatal Casualties of the Vietnam War, DCAS Vietnam Conflict Extract File record counts by Incident or Death Date (Year) (as of April 29, 2008), *National Archives*, <<http://www.archives.gov/research/military/vietnam-war/casualty-statistics.html#category>>

⁹⁵ Economic Report of the President Transmitted to the Congress, 1971, (Washington: February 1971), *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/economic_reports/1971.pdf> p. 4

⁹⁶ Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon, Washington, September 18, 1971, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976 Volume VII, Vietnam, July 1970-January 1972*, <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v07/d257>>

⁹⁷ Kissinger, *White House Years*, p. 275

Hanoi of our determination and withdrawing too slowly to satisfy the American public.’⁹⁸ However, even Kissinger recognised that ‘the only real alternatives to Vietnamization were immediate withdrawal or... escalation.’⁹⁹ The other solutions would potentially have had destructive consequences for a peace agreement to end the war. Kissinger also recognised the significance of Vietnamization in a memorandum to Nixon: ‘first, it told the North Vietnamese that they had to pay a price to get us out of the South quickly and totally. Second, it painted the prospect of the South Vietnamese government growing stronger and perhaps able to make it on its own.’¹⁰⁰ Therefore, while withdrawals might have impeded on Nixon’s negotiating stance, it was hoped that Vietnamization and the build-up of South Vietnam would be the best substitute for American troops.

To assess the potential successes of Vietnamization, this part of the chapter will look at how the strategy benefitted both the U.S. and the South Vietnamese based on the information gathered by the Americans. The available evidence from the Nixon administration suggested that Vietnamization was successful and therefore troop withdrawals continued. Although there may be debate over how successful Vietnamization was, it is important to realise that the information being given to Nixon indicated success. Therefore, it becomes more difficult to criticise Nixon for continually withdrawing troops if the South Vietnamese were not ready because this was not the information that he received. The counterinsurgency expert Sir Robert Thompson provided Nixon with multiple reports over the course of four years which suggested that Vietnamization was working. In 1969, Kissinger stated that Thompson’s report indicated the following: ‘there has been great improvement in the military and political picture, and we have a winning position. We need

⁹⁸ Kissinger, *White House Years*, p. 284

⁹⁹ Kissinger, *White House Years*, p. 286

¹⁰⁰ Memorandum From the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon, Washington, September 18, 1971, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976 Volume VII, Vietnam, July 1970–January 1972*, <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v07/d257>>

continued application of the “do it yourself” concept for the GVN and confidence in correctness of our policy.’¹⁰¹ In 1971, another of Thompson’s reports indicated that ‘there is nothing to worry about in the pacification program... You can safely accelerate U.S. withdrawals to the point where the U.S. force level will total about 50,000 by next June 30, and will consist primarily of tactical air, helicopter support, and servicing elements for military assistance.’¹⁰² Furthermore, following the North Vietnamese Spring Offensive of 1972, Thompson indicated that Vietnamization was working; he concluded that ‘the North Vietnamese offensive has been militarily defeated and has caused little damage to the Vietnamization and Pacification programs.’¹⁰³

The advantages of successful Vietnamization for the South Vietnamese were indicated in Nixon’s foreign policy reports. In the Second Annual Report to Congress on United States Foreign Policy, Nixon stated that ‘two years ago there was no assurance that the South Vietnamese could undertake large-scale military operations on their own. Now, they have proven their ability to do so.’¹⁰⁴ For the Americans this ability meant that they could reduce their role in the war and thus pacify domestic opposition. Nixon further recognised the South Vietnamese efforts in making sure that Vietnamization succeeded: ‘this progress has been made possible largely by the efforts of the South Vietnamese. It is they who have compensated for the reduced U.S. effort. It is they who now carry the major part of

¹⁰¹ Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon, Washington, December 12, 1969, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976 Volume VI, Vietnam, January 1969–July 1970*, <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v06/d158>>

¹⁰² Memorandum From the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon, Washington, October 16, 1971, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976, Volume VII, Vietnam, July 1970–January 1972*, <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v07/d270>>

¹⁰³ Memorandum From the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon, Washington, July 15, 1972, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976 Volume VIII, Vietnam, January–October 1972*, <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v08/d203>>

¹⁰⁴ Richard Nixon, ‘Second Annual Report to the Congress on United States Foreign Policy’, February 25, 1971, Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, <<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=3324>>

the burden and are progressively taking on more.’¹⁰⁵ One of the intended aspects of Vietnamization was to display South Vietnamese confidence in their own strength. It was hoped that the North Vietnamese would recognise the increased strength and confidence of the South Vietnamese despite American troop withdrawals and therefore be more willing to proceed with an agreement to end the war. In the Third Annual Report to Congress on United States Foreign Policy from 1972, Nixon displayed much confidence in the abilities of the South Vietnamese: ‘as our role has diminished, South Vietnam has been able increasingly to meet its own defence needs and provide growing security to its people.’¹⁰⁶

Pacification was an additional strand of Vietnamization which was intended to help the South Vietnamese increase their defences in the countryside, proliferate support for the regime and push back enemy forces. As stated by Nixon: ‘American withdrawal is the primary reflection of Vietnamization while pacification is its primary goal.’¹⁰⁷ In his 1969 foreign policy report, Nixon identified the main objectives for the pacification programme: ‘(1) an adequate defense, and (2) a fully functioning government resident in the hamlet 24 hours a day. If the Government can achieve these two objectives, it can prevent the enemy from subverting and terrorizing the population or mobilizing it for its own purposes.’¹⁰⁸ In essence, the hamlets in the countryside should be impenetrable by outside enemy forces. Within later foreign policy reports, Nixon explained some of the main successes of the pacification program: ‘the enemy's main force units have been pushed farther away from

¹⁰⁵ Richard Nixon, ‘Second Annual Report to the Congress on United States Foreign Policy’, February 25, 1971, Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, <<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=3324>>

¹⁰⁶ Richard Nixon, ‘Third Annual Report to the Congress on United States Foreign Policy’, February 9, 1972, Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, <<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=3736>>

¹⁰⁷ Richard Nixon, ‘Second Annual Report to the Congress on United States Foreign Policy’, February 25, 1971, Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, <<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=3324>>

¹⁰⁸ Richard Nixon, ‘First Annual Report to the Congress on United States Foreign Policy for the 1970's’, February 18, 1970, Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, <<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=2835>>

population centers, the task of extending governmental presence has become progressively easier.¹⁰⁹ The result of this was that ‘over 80 percent of the total population of South Vietnam, including the six million urban dwellers and eight million in rural areas, is under effective Government control’¹¹⁰ and ‘now the enemy mounts very few significant operations... Pacification has made steady progress throughout these two years.’¹¹¹ Nixon concluded by stating that ‘more South Vietnamese now receive government protection and services than at any time in the past decade.’¹¹² If more of the South Vietnamese areas were under effective control of their government this meant that the need for American forces in these areas was reduced and thus Nixon could afford to continue withdrawals.

The advantages of successful Vietnamization for America were indicated by Nixon in his Second Annual Report to the Congress on United States Foreign Policy, February 25th 1971. In this report, Nixon specified various aspects of the Vietnamization strategy that succeeded for example: ‘troop levels have dropped at a steady rate. The process will continue’;¹¹³ ‘American combat deaths... the decline has been constant’;¹¹⁴ the decline in the ‘ratio of South Vietnamese forces to American forces in Vietnam... today it is more than 3 ½

¹⁰⁹ Richard Nixon, ‘Second Annual Report to the Congress on United States Foreign Policy’, February 25, 1971, Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, <<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=3324>>

¹¹⁰ Richard Nixon, ‘Third Annual Report to the Congress on United States Foreign Policy’, February 9, 1972, Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, <<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=3736>>

¹¹¹ Richard Nixon, ‘Second Annual Report to the Congress on United States Foreign Policy’, February 25, 1971, Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, <<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=3324>>

¹¹² Richard Nixon, ‘Third Annual Report to the Congress on United States Foreign Policy’, February 9, 1972, Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, <<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=3736>>

¹¹³ Richard Nixon, ‘Second Annual Report to the Congress on United States Foreign Policy’, February 25, 1971, Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, <<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=3324>>

¹¹⁴ Richard Nixon, ‘Second Annual Report to the Congress on United States Foreign Policy’, February 25, 1971, Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, <<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=3324>>

to 1',¹¹⁵ and the decline in 'the ratio of South Vietnamese to American major engagements... now it is about 16 to 1.'¹¹⁶ In addition, Nixon's Third Annual Report to Congress on Foreign Policy stated that 'our ground combat role has effectively ended... As I write this Report, our troop level has dropped below 139,000-and will be no higher than 69,000 by the first day of May. In December 1971 our combat deaths were down to 17. Air sorties, budget costs, draft calls--all have sharply declined.'¹¹⁷ Nixon's reports showed that Vietnamization gradually achieved its desired intentions to benefit the U.S. politically and economically. With regards to the 1971 Lam Son 719 operation, Nixon stated 'because of the problem of American domestic opinion and because the South Vietnamese wanted to prove how successful Vietnamization had been, we decided that the operation would be an ARVN exercise; the United States would supply only air cover and artillery support.'¹¹⁸ The evidence suggested that if Vietnamization had been unworthy then the ARVN would have not been able to take on the military responsibility of the Lam Son 719 operation. Furthermore, it also revealed the increased confidence of the South Vietnamese in their own abilities, as argued by Nixon: 'Vietnamization made very encouraging advances during 1970. The fundamental question remains: can the South Vietnamese fully stand on their own against a determined enemy? We – and more importantly the South Vietnamese – are confident that they can.'¹¹⁹

In an address to the nation on Vietnam from May 14th 1969, Nixon outlined his intention for the political future of South Vietnam: 'we seek the opportunity for the South

¹¹⁵ Richard Nixon, 'Second Annual Report to the Congress on United States Foreign Policy', February 25, 1971, Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, <<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=3324>>

¹¹⁶ Richard Nixon, 'Second Annual Report to the Congress on United States Foreign Policy', February 25, 1971, Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, <<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=3324>>

¹¹⁷ Richard Nixon, 'Third Annual Report to the Congress on United States Foreign Policy', February 9, 1972, Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, <<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=3736>>

¹¹⁸ Nixon, *Memoirs*, p. 498

¹¹⁹ Richard Nixon, 'Second Annual Report to the Congress on United States Foreign Policy', February 25, 1971, Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, <<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=3324>>

Vietnamese people to determine their own political future without outside interference.’¹²⁰ It is argued by historians, such as Leslie H. Gelb, that Nixon’s statement simply inferred that the U.S. would ‘allow the Vietcong and Saigon regime to slug it out on the battlefield or in the ballot box... [and] the United States would accept the verdict whoever the victor might be.’¹²¹ However, Gelb’s simplistic argument can be opposed by Nixon’s previously mentioned speech. In Nixon’s address to the nation, he referred to the South Vietnamese having no ‘outside interference’ with their political issues. It is important to recognise that Nixon might have also been referring to the United States in this as well as enemy Communist countries, as it was not their or anyone else’s prerogative to decide the South Vietnamese political future.

Nixon’s final Foreign Policy Report to Congress, stated that he wanted ‘to seek a just peace, we pursued two distinct but mutually supporting courses of action: Negotiations and Vietnamization.’¹²² It is suggested by Nixon in the final report that Vietnamization was intended to support negotiations to ultimately bring the war in Vietnam to an end; he further argued that ‘Vietnamization is not a substitute for negotiations, but a spur to negotiations.’¹²³ Therefore, Vietnamization intended to strengthen the South Vietnamese in a multitude of ways and it was hoped that the North Vietnamese would recognise this and be more inclined to negotiate. In a report to Congress in 1972, Nixon argued: ‘I am convinced that the United States can set itself no more worthy goal than fostering in Asia the self-reliance that made our

¹²⁰ Richard Nixon, ‘Address to the Nation on Vietnam,’ May 14, 1969, Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, <<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=2047>>

¹²¹ Leslie H. Gelb, *The Irony of Vietnam: The System Worked*, (Washington: The Brookings Institution, 1979), p. 349

¹²² Richard Nixon, ‘First Annual Report to the Congress on United States Foreign Policy for the 1970’s,’ February 18, 1970, Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, <<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=2835>>

¹²³ Richard Nixon, ‘First Annual Report to the Congress on United States Foreign Policy for the 1970’s,’ February 18, 1970, Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, <<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=2835>>

own nation great.’¹²⁴ Nixon’s statement was significant as it alluded to America’s own struggle for independence which provided an example of a developing country’s successful self-determination. As agreed in the Paris Peace Accords, 1973: ‘the South Vietnamese people’s right to self-determination is sacred, inalienable, and shall be respected by all countries.’¹²⁵ Therefore, the evidence suggests that this strand of Vietnamization was an attempt to spur on negotiations; to convince both the North and South Vietnamese that independence could be achieved through the strength and determination of any country.

The strategy of Vietnamization emphasised self-determination of the South Vietnamese, not only toward military aspects but also toward political problems. Of course, the United States wanted to play a supporting role but the Nixon administration believed that it was not their responsibility or right to put in place a political faction that might not have been internationally recognised or supported. In essence the U.S. wanted to give the South Vietnamese the ability to defend themselves and determine the way their country was run; something which was threatened by the North Vietnamese. As stated in the Third Foreign Policy Report: ‘we are ready to reach an agreement which allows the South Vietnamese to determine their own future without outside interference. This goal can be reached whenever Hanoi distinguishes between a settlement and a surrender.’¹²⁶ It was the intention of the U.S. to give the South Vietnamese a basic platform to work from and build up, in this way the Nixon administration could be seen as honourable for providing assistance to help a struggling country instead of taking charge of the situation. Nixon stated: ‘it was vital to reach a settlement that would provide a framework for South Vietnamese self-determination

¹²⁴ Richard Nixon, ‘Third Annual Report to the Congress on United States Foreign Policy’, February 9, 1972, Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, <<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=3736>>

¹²⁵ ‘Excerpts from the Paris Accords, January 27, 1973’, Online by *Vassar College*, <<http://vietnam.vassar.edu/overview/doc16.html>>

¹²⁶ Richard Nixon, ‘Third Annual Report to the Congress on United States Foreign Policy’, February 9, 1972, Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, <<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=3736>>

and for our honorable disengagement.¹²⁷ It was argued by Nixon that it was never a goal of the U.S. to become victorious against the North Vietnamese both militarily and politically, he stated ‘we did not seek to impose a political victory, any more than a military victory, but we were not prepared to impose a political defeat.’¹²⁸ Therefore, the evidence from the Foreign Policy Reports support the argument that Vietnamization also had an honourable political agenda aimed at increasing the confidence of a country that was under threat from an enemy and the Nixon administration did not want to overplay their role as they were attempting to wind down their involvement. As stated in the 1973 Paris Peace Accords: ‘the South Vietnamese people shall decide themselves the political future of South Viet-Nam through genuinely free and democratic general elections under international supervision.’¹²⁹

It would be unfair to criticise Nixon’s administration for separating the political and military issues as Nixon and Kissinger believed that they had no right to impose any political influence. This argument can be supported by Nixon’s 1973 Foreign Policy Report: ‘we preferred to concentrate on those aspects of a settlement that directly involved us--the military activity, withdrawals, and prisoners. We felt the political future should be negotiated by the South Vietnamese themselves, hopefully in a calmer atmosphere.’¹³⁰ From Nixon’s statement it can be concluded that once the military problems had ended in Vietnam, it was hoped that the South Vietnamese would be strong enough to defend and support their own political faction and to negotiate with the North Vietnamese. Furthermore, in Chapter IV,

¹²⁷ Richard Nixon, ‘Fourth Annual Report to the Congress on United States Foreign Policy’, May 3, 1973, Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, <<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=3832>>

¹²⁸ Richard Nixon, ‘Fourth Annual Report to the Congress on United States Foreign Policy’, May 3, 1973, Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, <<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=3832>>

¹²⁹ Excerpts from the Paris Accords, January 27, 1973’, Online by *Vassar College*, <<http://vietnam.vassar.edu/overview/doc16.html>>

¹³⁰ Richard Nixon, ‘Fourth Annual Report to the Congress on United States Foreign Policy’, May 3, 1973, Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, <<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=3832>>

Article 9 of the 1973 Paris Peace Accords it was stated that ‘foreign countries shall not impose any political tendency or personality on the South Vietnamese people.’¹³¹ It would have been problematic for the Nixon administration to try and solve the political problems in Vietnam as it might have run the risk of condemnation from other countries. Therefore the evidence suggested that the U.S. acted honourably in aiding the defence of the South Vietnamese political problems.

To conclude, Nixon stated in the final Foreign Policy Report: ‘we sought peace with honor - through negotiation if possible, through Vietnamization if the enemy gave us no choice.’¹³² The first part of this chapter argued that Vietnamization was an honourable strategy of the Nixon administration’s policies; in opposition to the orthodox historiography. The evidence that had been used showed that reduced American involvement in the Vietnam War would be beneficial to both the U.S. and the South Vietnamese. The U.S. would benefit from troop withdrawals, lower casualty rates and lower military spending; this would help to cool American domestic opposition. Furthermore, troop withdrawals showed Americans and a larger international audience that America was willing to wind down the war and thus the burden of bringing an end to the Vietnam War would be transferred to the North Vietnamese. Nixon argued ‘the phased shifting of defense responsibilities to the South Vietnamese would give them the time and means to adjust. It would assure the American people that our own involvement was not open-ended. It would preserve our credibility abroad and our cohesion at home.’¹³³ Additionally, the alternatives to Vietnamization were either drastic escalation or unilateral withdrawal and so to ‘Vietnamize’ the war seemed the most honourable option.

¹³¹ Excerpts from the Paris Accords, January 27, 1973’, Online by *Vassar College*, <<http://vietnam.vassar.edu/overview/doc16.html>>

¹³² Richard Nixon, ‘Fourth Annual Report to the Congress on United States Foreign Policy’, May 3, 1973, Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, <<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=3832>>

¹³³ Richard Nixon, ‘Fourth Annual Report to the Congress on United States Foreign Policy’, May 3, 1973, Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, <<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=3832>>

Therefore, Jussi Hanhimaki's argument that 'Vietnamization did little to achieve peace with honour'¹³⁴ does not appear to recognise the benefits of this strategy for the South Vietnamese. The second part of this chapter highlighted some of the successes of Vietnamization and Pacification which identified how the strategy increased military and political defence and confidence among the South Vietnamese; it was hoped that this would convince the North Vietnamese to proceed with negotiations. The example of the Lam Son 719 Operation was used to support this argument as the ARVN took on a greater role in military operations and were mostly successful in their attempts. Therefore, it was anticipated that the North Vietnamese would realise that the South had increased strength and confidence and would not need to rely on the U.S. The second part of the chapter corresponds with the revisionist argument that there were visible South Vietnamese gains following Vietnamization, as George Herring argued: 'Vietnamization was in full swing by early 1970, and most observers agreed that significant gains had been made.'¹³⁵ The developed strength of the South Vietnamese might have convinced the North that they could defend themselves without American support. Therefore, the evidence suggested that Vietnamization was an honourable way to convince the North Vietnamese to negotiate and ultimately bring an end to the war. The third part of this chapter argued that it would be unfair to criticise the Nixon administration for separating the political and military issues in the Vietnam War; this is because the Americans believed that the South Vietnamese should decide their own political future without the interference of any outsider countries. This chapter also opposes the post-revisionist argument, as Gabriel Kolko argued that 'peace with honor' was unlikely.¹³⁶ On the contrary, Vietnamization was honourably intended to increase the confidence and defence of the South Vietnamese; evidence suggests that the information given to the Nixon

¹³⁴ Hanhimaki, 'Foreign Policy Overview', p. 359

¹³⁵ Herring, *America's Longest War*, p. 226

¹³⁶ Kolko, *Anatomy of War*, p. 355

administration advised that the South Vietnamese were gaining significant strength and so U.S. troop withdrawals continued.

Chapter Three: Operation Linebacker II, December 18-29, 1972

On December 18th 1972, the United States began heavy bombing with the use of B-52s over North Vietnam. Officially known as Operation Linebacker II, the bombings lasted for twelve days in total over the festive period and thus became known as the ‘Christmas bombings.’¹³⁷ The bombings were initiated as a result of continuous intransigence from the North and South Vietnamese in peace negotiations. In Henry Kissinger’s memoirs, he carefully explained how the North Vietnamese had forced them into returning to military operations to bring about an end to the war and more specifically to negotiations. Kissinger argued that ‘Hanoi had in effect made a strategic decision to prolong the war, abort all negotiations, and at the last moment seek unconditional victory.’¹³⁸

This chapter will argue that the Christmas Bombings represented the only viable solution for the Nixon administration to reach a peace agreement with the North Vietnamese. An argument will be made against the claim from some historians, such as Gabriel Kolko, that the Nixon administration was simply seeking a ‘decent interval’ between American withdrawal and the end of the war to protect their international credibility.¹³⁹ Undoubtedly the American bombing campaign over North Vietnam once again attracted the attention of the American public as it appeared that Nixon had broken his promise of Vietnamizing the war by escalating military operations. However, this chapter will argue that from evidence gathered by the Americans and the ongoing intransigence of both Vietnamese sides; Operation Linebacker II seemed necessary to incite commitment to a serious peace agreement. Although there is little argument that the bombing strategy can be considered honourable, evidence in this chapter will demonstrate that it was the only way to achieve

¹³⁷ Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War*, p. 413

¹³⁸ Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War*, p. 409

¹³⁹ Kolko, *Anatomy of War*, p. 451

peace through a negotiated settlement of the war. With regards to Nixon's decision to go ahead with these bombings, Henry Kissinger argued that '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.'¹⁴⁰ To assess how necessary the Linebacker II Operation was, this chapter will assess the targets of the operation, the intended incentives for Hanoi, the incentives for President Thieu, the return of American Prisoners of War and the agreement to return to the negotiating table.

Among orthodox historiography American bombing in Vietnam was widely condemned. Historians such as Jussi Hanhimaki have argued that 'bombing campaign that had no obvious military objective... the bombings focused heavily on the key areas near Hanoi and Haiphong inflicting heavy "collateral" (i.e. civilian) damage.'¹⁴¹ Furthermore, Hanhimaki argued that the bombing had limited influence over the North Vietnamese; he stated 'the impact of the Christmas Bombings on the morale of the North was minimal.'¹⁴² One of the major arguments prevalent among historians was that the Nixon administration 'was not searching for peace with honour but an exit strategy and a decent interval before South Vietnam's political future was determined.'¹⁴³ However, revisionist historians such as Guenter Lewy have argued that bombing campaigns and more specifically 'Linebacker II helped bring about a cease-fire, but it failed to achieve a settlement that could be considered a victory for either South Vietnam or the U.S.'¹⁴⁴

Post-revisionists tend to be fairly critical of Nixon's foreign policy toward Vietnam but recognise the limited options that the Nixon administration had remaining. Gabriel Kolko argued that 'all that the Christmas bombing did was isolate the administration politically and

¹⁴⁰ Kissinger, *White House Years*, p. 1461

¹⁴¹ Hanhimaki, *The Flawed Architect*, p. 253-4

¹⁴² Hanhimaki, *The Flawed Architect*, p. 254

¹⁴³ Hanhimaki, *The Flawed Architect*, p. 258

¹⁴⁴ Lewy, *America in Vietnam*, p. 415

put it on the defensive.¹⁴⁵ In contrast to orthodox historians, Kolko claimed that there was ‘no evidence whatsoever for, and a great deal against, the notion that the White House was merely interested in a “decent interval” after the Paris Agreement during which the United States could respectably extricate itself from Thieu’s case.’¹⁴⁶ Similarly, George Herring argued that ‘the bombing certainly gave the North Vietnamese reason to resume negotiations, especially since they had exhausted their stock of surface-to-air missiles by December 30.’¹⁴⁷

After the collapse of the October 1972 agreement, there had still been no real progress with negotiations by December 13th 1972. Therefore, one of the Nixon administration’s priorities was to speed up the negotiation process with North and South Vietnam to get a peace agreement finalised. By this point Nixon claimed that ‘only the strongest action would have any effect in convincing Hanoi that negotiating a fair settlement with us was a better option for them than continuing the war.’¹⁴⁸ One of the potential problems with the operation, which was fully recognised by the Nixon administration, was that severe bombings above the 20th parallel in Vietnam ‘would be strongly resented by many in the U.S. and especially those in the Congress who had long opposed the bombing of North Vietnam.’¹⁴⁹ However, a continuation of an already drawn out war was also likely to be poorly received. As stated by John Negroponte, of the National Security Council, December 14th 1972: ‘Hanoi has no intention to meet any of the basic requirements that we made clear to them... and through a series of irritating dilatory tactics has pursued a course which can be interpreted as desire to achieve either no agreement at all or an agreement substantially worse than that achieved in

¹⁴⁵ Kolko, *Anatomy of War*, p. 441

¹⁴⁶ Kolko, *Anatomy of War*, p. 451

¹⁴⁷ Herring, *America’s Longest War*, p. 316

¹⁴⁸ Nixon, *Memoirs*, p. 733

¹⁴⁹ Memorandum of Conversation, Saigon, December 19, 1972, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume IX, Vietnam, October 1972–January 1973*, <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v09/d197>>

late October.¹⁵⁰ Furthermore, with the upcoming meeting of the new 93rd United States Congress on January 3rd 1973, Kissinger told Alexander Haig that ‘given the complexion of the new Congress, we simply will not be able to hold Congressional support. This Congress is more liberal than the last.’¹⁵¹ Therefore, as the evidence suggested a continuation of the war was not an available opportunity for the U.S.

One of the main problems for the Nixon administration was to convince Hanoi that a continuation of the war would be the worst option; it was hoped the strength of U.S. bombings would deter the North from delaying talks and instead move them towards an agreement.¹⁵² In his memoirs, Kissinger explained that Alexander Haig, ‘favoured B-52 attacks, especially North of the 20th parallel, on the ground that only a massive shock could bring Hanoi back to the conference table... Nixon and Haig were essentially right... there were no other options.’¹⁵³ There were a multitude of reasons for the final decision to go ahead with the 1972 Linebacker II operation against Hanoi. Up until 1972 most of the fighting in the war occurred in South Vietnam, however it was believed by the Nixon administration that the bombing could bring the war to the North quite significantly. Nixon explained in the Fourth Annual Report to Congress, 1973: ‘we had to make clear that Hanoi could not continue to wage war in the South while its territory was immune, and that we would not

¹⁵⁰ Message From John D. Negroponte of the National Security Council Staff to the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), Paris, December 14, 1972, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume IX, Vietnam, October 1972–January 1973* <<http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v09/d174>>

¹⁵¹ Backchannel Message From the President’s Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Haig) to the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), (November 11, 1972), *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume IX, Vietnam, October 1972–January 1973*, <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v09/d99>>

¹⁵² Backchannel Message From the President’s Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Haig) to the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), Saigon, December 20, 1972, 0410Z, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume IX, Vietnam, October 1972–January 1973* <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v09/d205>>

¹⁵³ Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War*, p. 410

tolerate an indefinite delay in the negotiations.’¹⁵⁴ It was believed that if the U.S. could heavily disrupt the North Vietnamese then they might be more willing to accept agreements thus speeding up the process of negotiation.¹⁵⁵

Another reason for the operation was illustrated by Alexander Haig, who explained to President Thieu that the bombing was partially ‘designed to again convey to Hanoi that they could not trifle with President Nixon. More importantly, however, the action which was now underway would underline to Hanoi the determination of the President to enforce the provisions of any political settlement that might be arrived at.’¹⁵⁶ In essence, Haig was telling Thieu that the bombings acted as a warning to the North Vietnamese of the steps that the U.S. might take if they were to break any peace agreements that would eventually be made with the South. The Nixon administration wanted an agreement as soon as possible however they did not want that to effect the substance of the negotiations. Nixon stated to Kissinger in a memorandum before the bombings had begun: ‘while we want peace just as soon as we can get it, that we want a peace that is honorable and a peace that will last.’¹⁵⁷ Nixon hoped that the bombings would make the North Vietnamese realise that the U.S. was in no hurry to rush negotiations that would not be adequate for South Vietnam, he argued that those ‘two considerations—an honorable peace and a lasting peace—are the overriding considerations as distinguished from any deadline for rushing into a peace agreement which is not adequately nailed down in its details and which could lead to another war in the future.’¹⁵⁸ Therefore,

¹⁵⁴ Richard Nixon, ‘Fourth Annual Report to the Congress on United States Foreign Policy’, (May 3, 1973), Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, <<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=3832>>

¹⁵⁵ Henry Kissinger, *White House Years*, p. 1449

¹⁵⁶ Memorandum of Conversation, Saigon, December 19, 1972, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume IX, Vietnam, October 1972–January 1973*, <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v09/d197>>

¹⁵⁷ Memorandum From President Nixon to the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), Washington, December 15, 1972, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume IX, Vietnam, October 1972–January 1973* <<http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v09/d180>>

¹⁵⁸ Memorandum From President Nixon to the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), Washington, December 15, 1972, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume IX, Vietnam, October 1972–January 1973*, <<http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v09/d180>>

bombings would continue dependent upon the response of the North Vietnamese and the substance of their negotiations.

According to the Nixon administration the 1972 Christmas Bombings played a significant part in bringing Hanoi back to the negotiating table. In a conversation on January 4th 1973, Admiral Thomas H. Moorer, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, suggested that the bombings were vital to American interests. Moorer stated that the U.S. ‘had 731 B–52 sorties over North Vietnam against 40 targets. We lost about 2%. The North Vietnamese have about 900 missiles. They ran out of missiles. I think this pushed their quick reply to us.’¹⁵⁹ The information that was given to the Nixon administration identified that the defensive actions of the North Vietnamese dwindled and this may have had an impact on their decision to proceed with negotiations. Moorer further explained: ‘the reason they responded to us is we saturated their defences. We have many intercepts showing shortages. We could have gone on with relative impunity. They use 50 missiles for one aircraft they shoot down—about the same rate as the past.’¹⁶⁰ The evidence provided to the Nixon administration therefore suggests that Operation Linebacker II had significant military objectives, more specifically in reducing the military defences of the North Vietnamese. Melvin Laird explained that the reduction of Hanoi’s defences ‘had great psychological impact. It was a tremendous operation.’¹⁶¹ It is also significant that the Nixon administration remained in contact with the North Vietnamese while the bombings occurred in an attempt to make them realise that bombing could be concluded upon Hanoi’s request. Nixon explained in his Fourth Annual

¹⁵⁹ Memorandum of Conversation, Washington, January 4, 1973, 10 a.m., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume IX, Vietnam, October 1972–January 1973*, <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v09/d245>>

¹⁶⁰ Memorandum of Conversation, Washington, January 4, 1973, 10 a.m., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume IX, Vietnam, October 1972–January 1973*, <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v09/d245>>

¹⁶¹ Memorandum of Conversation, Washington, January 4, 1973, 10 a.m., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume IX, Vietnam, October 1972–January 1973*, <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v09/d245>>

Report to Congress: ‘during this time we maintained direct private communications with Hanoi. Once we had been assured that serious talks could again be undertaken, we suspended our bombing of North Vietnam above the 20th parallel on December 31, 1972.’¹⁶² The significance of this quotation lies in the direct link that Nixon displayed between the bombing of North Vietnam and the subsequent negotiations. Therefore, Nixon’s link supports the argument that Operation Linebacker II had a direct impact on peace negotiations as bombing was ended when North Vietnam agreed to resume negotiations.

The targeted bombing zones of Operation Linebacker II indicated clear objectives; it was hoped that these targets would be beneficial to the South Vietnamese because they attacked Hanoi’s communication and supply lines. By weakening the war effort of the North Vietnamese, the U.S. hoped that Hanoi would be more inclined to negotiate rather than continue the war. As explained to Kissinger by the Ambassador to Laos, G. McMurtrie Godley, American bombing was the best way to cut off the North because ‘as long as the fighting continues in Cambodia and Vietnam the North Vietnamese need the Ho Chi Minh Trail. The American bombing of the trail makes it more difficult for the North Vietnamese to get their supplies and manpower to their destinations in the South.’¹⁶³ Evidence indicated clear targets for the U.S. B-52s; in a conversation between Thomas Moorer and the Deputy Commander of the Military in Vietnam, John Vogt, bombing targets that would diminish North Vietnamese supplies were outlined: ‘the Hanoi Railroad Station right there down town and the marshalling yard which is loaded with railroad cars and full of supplies.’¹⁶⁴ Moorer

¹⁶² Richard Nixon, ‘Fourth Annual Report to the Congress on United States Foreign Policy’, (May 3, 1973), Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, <<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=3832>>

¹⁶³ Backchannel Message From the Ambassador to Laos (Godley) to the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), Vientiane, December 23, 1972, 0608Z, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume IX, Vietnam, October 1972–January 1973*, <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v09/d219>>

¹⁶⁴ Transcript of a Telephone Conversation Between the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Moorer) and the Deputy Commander, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (Vogt), December 14, 1972, 11:05 a.m., *Foreign*

then suggested further targets that would cause more harm to Hanoi's war effort, such as the 'big Transformer Station and Bac Yen Complex which I got a picture from today and it (looking at it this morning) is loaded with everything I can think of and it is only 20 miles North of Hanoi.'¹⁶⁵ These targets were intended to hinder the production and supply lines that were utilised by the North Vietnamese army. This operation was therefore further incentive for the North to commit to bringing about an end to the War in Vietnam as their fighting capabilities were being dwindled by continuous bombings and attacks. Similarly, during a discussion between Nixon and Kissinger for potential targets of the Linebacker II operation, Kissinger argued for the need to attack 'all power plants simultaneously... [And] we are going to get the ship yards in Haiphong, we are going to get the marshalling yards, the rail yards, Radio Hanoi, we'll get the transmitters at the outskirts of town.'¹⁶⁶

In a conversation between Kissinger and Nixon, there was discussion about some of the results of the bombing strategy and how this impacted the North Vietnamese. In this conversation it was stated that bombing had successfully attacked Radio Hanoi and they were off the air. Kissinger stated: 'Radio Hanoi has been off the air for ten hours... And that is bound to create havoc up there. [...] Because they rely on that radio, and also it's the radio on which all their guerrillas rely for news and instructions.'¹⁶⁷ This conversation can be used as evidence to argue that the 1972 December bombings had an impact on the war effort of the North Vietnamese as the U.S. had managed to disrupt their communications. The Nixon

Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume IX, Vietnam, October 1972–January 1973,
<<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v09/d176>>

¹⁶⁵ Transcript of a Telephone Conversation Between the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Moorer) and the Deputy Commander, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (Vogt), December 14, 1972, 11:05 a.m., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume IX, Vietnam, October 1972–January 1973,*
<<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v09/d176>>

¹⁶⁶ Transcript of a Telephone Conversation Between President Nixon and the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), Washington, December 17, 1972, 10:45 a.m., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume IX, Vietnam, October 1972–January 1973,*
<<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v09/d187>>

¹⁶⁷ Telephone Conversation Between President Nixon and the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), Washington, December 19, 1972, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume IX, Vietnam, October 1972–January 1973,* <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v09/d202>>

administration intended to weaken Hanoi to the point that they felt under threat from the U.S; as Moorer stated, the administration wanted to ‘isolate Hanoi from the rest of North Vietnam. Those targets that... join Hanoi to the remainder of North Vietnam will be attacked... resume destroying the northeast line of communications as a first priority with destruction of northwest line of communications as second priority. LOC attacks include bombing of RR bridges, RR yards, RR shops and highway bridges, and seeding of waterways.’¹⁶⁸

As with most twentieth century wars, bombing campaigns unfortunately caused some collateral damage to the surrounding areas. However, the Nixon administration believed that the designated targets for Operation Linebacker II would be significant enough to convince the North Vietnamese to end their intransigence toward peace agreements. In addition, the Nixon administration received a report that Hanoi was evacuating its citizens. In a telephone conversation between Henry Kissinger and Richard Nixon, Kissinger stated that ‘we just got a report that they are totally evacuating Hanoi.’¹⁶⁹ This indicated that there was less danger of injuring and killing civilians in Hanoi but also indicated that bombings must have been effective to induce evacuation. Therefore, Nixon claimed that the North Vietnamese ‘think we are going to come at them with more stuff all over the city? [...] That can’t [but] be affect[ing] their morale of their people to evacuate that city.’¹⁷⁰ The effect on North Vietnamese morale was also another incentive for the leaders to pursue agreements on ending the war. It is difficult to criticise the Nixon administration for causing civilian deaths in

¹⁶⁸ Message From the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Moorer) to the Commander in Chief, Pacific (Gayler) and the Commander in Chief, Strategic Air Command (Meyer), Washington, December 23, 1972, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume IX, Vietnam, October 1972–January 1973* <<http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v09/d222>>

¹⁶⁹ Transcript of a Telephone Conversation Between President Nixon and the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), December 23, 1972, 12:50 p.m., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976 Volume IX, Vietnam, October 1972–January 1973*, <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v09/d221>>

¹⁷⁰ Transcript of a Telephone Conversation Between President Nixon and the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), December 23, 1972, 12:50 p.m., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976 Volume IX, Vietnam, October 1972–January 1973*, <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v09/d221>>

Vietnam; the administration had been informed of Hanoi's evacuation and unfortunately civilian deaths were unavoidable due to the guerrilla nature of the warfare from the North and U.S. stray bombs.

Despite the efforts of the Nixon administration, reports from Hanoi made it to the American press and it was stated that the Linebacker II operation had damaged the 'Hanoi Hilton'; a camp which held American POWs and was satirically nicknamed after the Hilton Hotel by captured soldiers.¹⁷¹ On December 22nd 1972, in *The Washington Post*, Michael Gelter stated: 'Radio Hanoi claimed that the U.S. bombing on December 21 and 22 had damaged the Hilton-Hanoi, which had been turned into a prison holding captured American airmen, and injured "a number of residents."' ¹⁷² Richard T. Kennedy, of the National Security Council Staff, claimed that the North Vietnamese assertion that bombing had actually been detrimental to American interests was 'undoubtedly a propaganda ploy although it is claimed that Joan Baez and others examined damaged areas of the compound. From the descriptions it seems likely that any damage may have resulted from B-52 shock waves.' ¹⁷³ Kennedy argued that there was opposing evidence to North Vietnamese claims; he claimed that 'the nearest target was a marshalling yard, some 700 yards away, and this was hit by visual means. After resolving some differences of opinion on press handling, DOD is making statement that we hit only military targets.' ¹⁷⁴ The North Vietnamese clearly

¹⁷¹ Message From Richard T. Kennedy of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Haig), Washington, December 21, 1972, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume IX, Vietnam, October 1972-January 1973*, <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v09/d214>>

¹⁷² Michael Getler, 'Hanoi Claims Bombing Hit POW Camp,' *The Washington Post, Times Herald* (1959-1973) - Washington, D.C., (December 22, 1972), p. A1 <http://pqasb.pqarchiver.com/washingtonpost_historical/doc/148302654.html>

¹⁷³ Message From Richard T. Kennedy of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Haig), Washington, December 21, 1972, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume IX, Vietnam, October 1972-January 1973*, <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v09/d214>>

¹⁷⁴ Message From Richard T. Kennedy of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Haig), Washington, December 21, 1972, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume IX, Vietnam, October 1972-January 1973*, <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v09/d214>>

recognised the impact that such claims would have on the American public, however Kennedy also argued that if the Hanoi's claims were correct then 'it is the responsibility of the North Vietnamese under the Geneva Convention to insure that prisoners are kept away from areas of danger.'¹⁷⁵ Additionally, later evidence gathered by the Nixon administration revealed to them that Hanoi's claims were false. On January 4th 1973, in conversation with the President, Thomas Moorer stated that 'we have pictures of all the POW camps. They were not damaged. We have eye-witness accounts of missiles falling back.'¹⁷⁶ Therefore, the evidence supports the argument that the Nixon administration were not carelessly bombing populated areas of Hanoi in attempt to speed up negotiations but had specific targets that were intended to hinder the North Vietnamese war effort.

Although it is difficult to argue that this part of Nixon's strategy was honourable, it can still be regarded as a way to achieve peace. Furthermore, the Nixon administration argued that while they were being criticised for such damage, the North Vietnamese were not. In a memorandum from January 4th 1973, Nixon argued that 'we should get out the details on the hospitals, orphanages, and so on, and schools that were destroyed by the enemy... It's a double standard, and hypocritical. American airmen risk their lives and do their damndest to avoid civilian targets, and we get these complaints, but not on the other side.'¹⁷⁷ Furthermore, Kissinger stated that the Americans were accused of 'indiscriminate carpet bombing of heavily populated areas.' However, Kissinger argued that 'the targets were airports, anti-aircraft defences, industrial plants. As it happened, most of these were on the other side of

¹⁷⁵ Message From Richard T. Kennedy of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Haig), Washington, December 21, 1972, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume IX, Vietnam, October 1972-January 1973*, <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v09/d214>>

¹⁷⁶ Memorandum of Conversation, Washington, January 4, 1973, 10 a.m., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume IX, Vietnam, October 1972-January 1973*, <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v09/d245>>

¹⁷⁷ Memorandum of Conversation, Washington, January 4, 1973, 10 a.m., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume IX, Vietnam, October 1972-January 1973*, <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v09/d245>>

the Red River from Hanoi's residential areas. There was next to no damage in Hanoi proper except that caused by a few stray bombs.'¹⁷⁸

After Henry Kissinger's news conference on October 26th 1972, which claimed that the Nixon administration 'believe that peace is at hand. We believe that an agreement is within sight...'¹⁷⁹ the hopes of the American public and Congress were raised. However, the intransigence of both North and South Vietnam meant that while the American troops had been successfully withdrawn, the Prisoners of War (POWs) remained in North Vietnam and with no agreement nearing it seemed less likely that the prisoners would be released. This claim is corroborated by Melvin Laird, in a memorandum to the President; he stated 'the US has encouraged the US people and the rest of the world to believe that peace is at hand and that our POWs would be home momentarily.'¹⁸⁰ However, Laird regarded this as a 'dilemma' for the Nixon administration and advised the President that 'we believe that you will no longer get the support of Congress for continuation of the war if our POWs are not returned to the US promptly.'¹⁸¹ Laird's advice provided evidence for the argument there was a political purpose to Operation Linebacker II; for example, if the U.S. did not attempt to quicken an agreement on the end of the war, they would lose Congressional support for aiding the South Vietnamese in negotiations. With the new 93rd Congressional taking office on January 3rd 1973, Nixon was very aware of the pressure to get an agreement reached before the new Congress cut funding.¹⁸² Therefore, as Kissinger predicted 'if the negotiations

¹⁷⁸ Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War*, p. 414

¹⁷⁹ Henry Kissinger, *White House Years*, p. 1399

¹⁸⁰ Memorandum From Secretary of Defense Laird to President Nixon, Washington, December 12, 1972, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume IX, Vietnam, October 1972-January 1973*, <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v09/d166>>

¹⁸¹ Memorandum From Secretary of Defense Laird to President Nixon, Washington, December 12, 1972, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume IX, Vietnam, October 1972-January 1973*, <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v09/d166>>

¹⁸² Backchannel Message From the President's Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Haig) to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), (November 11, 1972), *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume IX, Vietnam, October 1972-January 1973*, <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v09/d99>>

break down tomorrow we will have to resume massive bombing and take the position that our only objectives henceforth will be U.S. military disengagement in return for the release of our prisoners.’¹⁸³

The available evidence for Operation Linebacker II suggested that the return of the American POWs was one of many incentives to bomb north of the 20th parallel. Furthermore, the evidence indicated that the Nixon administration believed bombings had the potential to draw North Vietnam back to negotiations and an agreement on the return of POWs could finally be reached. Secretary of State, William P. Rogers, stated that the bombing campaign showed ‘a significant military effect, then people can draw their own conclusions on why they [North Vietnam] returned to the table. We did our bombing carefully; that caused some losses.’¹⁸⁴ Rogers further indicated that criticisms over the bombings were unwarranted because ‘we merely returned to our previous policy when they backed away from the agreement’¹⁸⁵ and therefore the Nixon administration needed to ‘show the proof that we didn’t bomb our own POWs and other instances to show all the false statements being made.’¹⁸⁶ Therefore, it would seem inaccurate to argue that the Linebacker II Operation was counterproductive to American interests, which was argued by Hanhimaki, as the Nixon administration acquired evidence to prove that bombings did not harm their own soldiers and were not detrimental to U.S. interests.

¹⁸³ Message From the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon, Paris, December 6, 1972, 1850Z, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume IX, Vietnam, October 1972–January 1973* <<http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v09/d144>>

¹⁸⁴ Memorandum of Conversation, Washington, January 4, 1973, 10 a.m., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume IX, Vietnam, October 1972–January 1973*, <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v09/d245>>

¹⁸⁵ Memorandum of Conversation, Washington, January 4, 1973, 10 a.m., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume IX, Vietnam, October 1972–January 1973*, <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v09/d245>>

¹⁸⁶ Memorandum of Conversation, Washington, January 4, 1973, 10 a.m., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume IX, Vietnam, October 1972–January 1973*, <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v09/d245>>

The 1972 Christmas Bombings were partially used as a tool to persuade the North Vietnamese to continue negotiations. However, there is evidence to suggest that the bombing strategy was also intended for Nguyen Van Thieu, the leader of South Vietnam, who had become intransigent with peace agreements too. In a message from Henry Kissinger to Alexander Haig, it was made clear that there was a need for the Nixon administration to influence the decisions of both North and South Vietnam. Kissinger stated that we ‘find ourselves in an increasingly uncomfortable position. We have no leverage on Hanoi or Saigon, and we are becoming prisoners of both sides’ internecine conflicts. Our task clearly is to get some leverage on both of them.’¹⁸⁷ Thieu’s intransigence would become problematic for the Nixon administration if it was not immediately amended, as argued by Kissinger in his memoirs: ‘Saigon, for its part, would see no point in flexibility; with Congress undoubtedly pressing cutoffs of funds it would run no additional risks by sticking to its course.’¹⁸⁸ Therefore, Kissinger advised that ‘we should reseed the mines, as heavily as possible including of course north of the 20th parallel... We should take off all restrictions on bombing south of the 20th parallel and step up our attacks, particularly by B-52s... We should resume reconnaissance activities north of the 20th parallel immediately which would serve as a warning to Hanoi.’¹⁸⁹ This evidence indicated a further motive for Operation Linebacker II to convince both the North and South Vietnam to participate in serious negotiations by increasing leverage over both regions or face the potential termination of American support.

¹⁸⁷ Message From the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to the President’s Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Haig), Paris, December 12, 1972, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume IX, Vietnam, October 1972–January 1973* <<http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v09/d163>>

¹⁸⁸ Kissinger, *White House Years*, p. 1447

¹⁸⁹ Message From the President’s Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to the President’s Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Haig), Paris, December 12, 1972, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume IX, Vietnam, October 1972–January 1973* <<http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v09/d163>>

For the Nixon administration, however, it was more than just leverage that was needed over the South Vietnamese; the U.S. also needed to preserve Saigon's support. In Nixon's Fourth Foreign Policy Report to Congress from May 3rd 1973, he stated that the administration 'talked sternly with our friends in South Vietnam. In our view they were holding out for terms that were impossible to achieve without several more years of warfare--if then.'¹⁹⁰ The problem for Nixon was that during December 1972, there were already talks of cutting aid to the war from Congress. In a letter to the South Vietnamese, Nixon stated that members of the 93rd Congress have made clear that 'if Saigon is the only roadblock for reaching agreement on this basis they will personally lead the fight when the new Congress reconvenes on January 3 to cut off all military and economic assistance to Saigon.'¹⁹¹ Henry Kissinger's final cable to Paris, from December 11th 1972, stated that 'pressures on Saigon would be essential so that Thieu does not think he has faced us down, and we can demonstrate that we will not put up with our ally's intransigence any more than we will do so with our enemy.'¹⁹² Therefore, the Nixon administration needed to show that they would not accept the current South Vietnamese stance but at the same time encourage them that they had continued American support. One way of retaining Thieu's support would be to bomb north of the 20th parallel and take the Vietnam War to Hanoi.

In a conversation between South Vietnamese Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker, Alexander Haig, Thieu and South Vietnamese Press Secretary, Hoang Duc Nha, the Nixon administration argued that 'President Thieu cannot rationally deprive President Nixon of the

¹⁹⁰ Richard Nixon, 'Fourth Annual Report to the Congress on United States Foreign Policy', (May 3, 1973), Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, <<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=3832>>

¹⁹¹ Message from President Nixon, November 24, 1972, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976 Volume IX, Vietnam, October 1972-January 1973*, <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v09/d125>>

¹⁹² Kissinger, *White House Years*, p. 1445-6

platform he must have to continue to support President Thieu.¹⁹³ Haig further argued that ‘the outcome would be inevitable and prompt a total cut off of U.S. support. This is not the desire of President Nixon and is not presented to President Thieu as a threat but merely a recitation of simple objective reality.’¹⁹⁴ Therefore, Operation Linebacker II presented further incentive for Thieu to proceed with negotiations as the alternative would have been to continue the war; this would not have been accepted by Nixon or Congress and American aid would be withdrawn. According to Nixon’s Diary this show of support and constant line of communication with Thieu was successful. Nixon stated ‘the South Vietnamese seem to be coming more into line’¹⁹⁵ and that Thieu was stating that he was going to get ‘a commitment from the United States to continue to protect South Vietnam in the event such an agreement is broken.’¹⁹⁶

In his memoirs, Richard Nixon wrote about how the Linebacker II Operation was no easy decision to make but that it was a useful tool to speed up negotiations. Nixon stated: ‘the order to renew bombing the week before Christmas was the most difficult decision I made during the entire war; at the same time, however it was also one of the most clear-cut and necessary ones.’¹⁹⁷ Furthermore, Nixon defended the operation by stating that bombing would continue dependent upon the response of the North Vietnamese: ‘we offered to stop the bombing above the 20th parallel once the arrangements for the meeting had been completed and had been publicly announced.’¹⁹⁸ In essence, the bombings would end when the negotiated agreements restarted and this was left up to the North Vietnamese to decide.

¹⁹³ Memorandum of Conversation, Saigon, December 19, 1972, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume IX, Vietnam, October 1972–January 1973*, <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v09/d197>>

¹⁹⁴ Memorandum of Conversation, Saigon, December 19, 1972, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume IX, Vietnam, October 1972–January 1973*, <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v09/d197>>

¹⁹⁵ Nixon, *Memoirs*, p. 744

¹⁹⁶ Nixon, *Memoirs*, p. 744

¹⁹⁷ Nixon, *Memoirs*, p. 734

¹⁹⁸ Nixon, *Memoirs*, p. 740-1

Evidence from the Nixon administration suggested that the President was honest to his claim that bombing would stop as soon as a meeting was agreed to. Nixon's administration told the North Vietnamese that 'if the DRV agrees to this meeting, the U.S., as a sign of its good will, will again suspend its bombing north of the 20th parallel starting as of midnight December 31 and lasting for the duration of the negotiating sessions.'¹⁹⁹ Additionally, further incentive was stated to make sure that the North Vietnamese did not once again resort to dilatory tactics: 'if an agreement is reached, this restriction will continue. The U.S. side reaffirms that it will stop all bombing and shelling against the territory of Democratic Republic of Vietnam within 48 hours of an agreement in Paris.'²⁰⁰ Eventually, as Nixon stated 'on December 28 the North Vietnamese gave in and confirmed the January 2 and January 8 dates... at 7pm Washington time on December 29 bombing above the 20th parallel was suspended.'²⁰¹ The evidence therefore suggests that the bombings helped to achieve a peace agreement in Vietnam, albeit in a non-peaceful way.

There was no doubt in Nixon's mind regarding the outcome of Operation Linebacker II, in his memoirs he argued that 'the bombing had done its job; it had been successful, and now it could be ended. It was good news for us all.'²⁰² Therefore, Nixon suggested that Operation Linebacker II certainly played a significant part in speeding up negotiations; however it is also important to recognise the continued diplomatic line between the U.S. and the North and South Vietnamese. In Henry Kissinger's memoirs, he argued that the combination of both diplomatic and military efforts eventually led to the peace agreement

¹⁹⁹ Message From Richard T. Kennedy of the National Security Council Staff to the Air Attaché at the Embassy in France (Guay), Washington, December 22, 1972, 0144Z, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976 Volume IX, Vietnam, October 1972-January 1973*, <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v09/d215>>

²⁰⁰ Message From Richard T. Kennedy of the National Security Council Staff to the Air Attaché at the Embassy in France (Guay), Washington, December 22, 1972, 0144Z, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976 Volume IX, Vietnam, October 1972-January 1973*, <<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v09/d215>>

²⁰¹ Nixon, *Memoirs*, p. 740-1

²⁰² Nixon, *Memoirs*, p. 748

being reached. Kissinger stated that diplomatic negotiations played a vital part in bringing the Vietnam War to an end, however he argued that diplomacy was not the only factor; he believed that military tactics such as Operation Linebacker II also played a significant part in ending the war.²⁰³ With regard to the historiographical debate, the argument of this chapter positions itself between the arguments made by revisionist and post-revisionist historians. While orthodox historians have argued that Operation Linebacker II was unnecessary, the combination of diplomacy and military pressure certainly had an impact on the North Vietnamese and made them eventually proceed with negotiations.²⁰⁴ Revisionist, Guenter Lewy argued that Operation Linebacker II helped to bring a cease-fire to Vietnam but also argued that there was an element of the Nixon administration seeking a decent interval from the war.²⁰⁵ This chapter has argued that the bombing strategy certainly did help to encourage both North and South Vietnam to proceed with negotiations, and there is no evidence to suggest a decent interval was sought. Operation Linebacker II was not the most honourable way to attain a peace agreement between the North and South Vietnamese. However, by 1972 with increasing intransigence from both Vietnamese regions, the Americans had few options to conclude the war. The other alternative of a continuation of the war had the potential to cause many more casualties for both the Americans and Vietnamese. Therefore, evidence supports the argument that Linebacker II was most valuable to the Nixon administration when combined with diplomatic lines of communication with both Vietnamese sides.

²⁰³ Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War*, p. 460

²⁰⁴ Hanhimaki, *The Flawed Architect*, p. 254

²⁰⁵ Lewy, *America In Vietnam*, p. 415

Conclusion

To assess the impact of Nixon's 'peace with honor' this dissertation has considered the policy of linkage, the strategy of Vietnamization and Operation Linebacker II. The Nixon administration attempted to influence the North and South Vietnamese into reaching a peace agreement that would end the Vietnam War. Unfortunately, a solution to a conflict that had carried on for over a generation was never going to be easily attainable. Similarly, the issues between North and South Vietnam were never going to be straightforwardly solved. In terms of casualties and costs the war was expensive for all that were involved; the Nixon administration wanted to achieve an honourable peace as soon as possible, but not one that would destroy all their previous efforts. Therefore, the purpose of this dissertation was to identify the impact of 'peace with honor' on the Nixon administration's foreign policy decisions.

Chapter one assessed Nixon's policy of linkage, this policy encouraged peace within international relations. It was anticipated by the Nixon administration that linkage would help to spur on peace negotiations with the Vietnamese. This chapter has argued that linkage was an honourable way for the Nixon administration to achieve peace for Vietnam; the policy promoted the cooperation of ideologically opposed countries and détente. This was particularly honourable as it marked a change in attitudes toward Communist countries. There is evidence to suggest that the advice given by the Soviet Union and China might have had an influence in the North Vietnamese decision to proceed with negotiations. However, linkage was not primarily intended to bring an end to the Vietnam War and therefore its influence on negotiations should not be overstated.

The Vietnamization strategy discussed in chapter two encouraged peace through strengthening the defence of the South Vietnamese. The Nixon administration hoped that the

increased strength of the South would convince the North that negotiations were the best option for them; the strength of the South was intended to replace the presence of U.S. troops. The strategy can be regarded as honourable as it encouraged the South Vietnamese to consolidate themselves as an independent country so that in future they would not need support from other countries for defence. There is evidence to support the argument that Vietnamization was successful for example; the Lam Son 719 operation was fought solely by South Vietnamese troops. Of course, Vietnamization alone would not have influenced the North Vietnamese decision outright. However, a combination of policies were likely to have a bigger influence over Hanoi.

Chapter three assessed Operation Linebacker II, the military operation to use B-52s over Hanoi in an attempt to get the North Vietnamese to proceed with serious negotiations and to show the South Vietnamese that they still had the support of the Nixon administration. Although a bombing campaign cannot be considered honourable, this military strategy was one of the few options that the Nixon administration had remaining. Evidence from the Nixon administration directly linked the Christmas Bombings to the resumption of negotiations with the North Vietnamese. Therefore, while the strategy may not have been particularly honourable; it certainly did have an influence on fast tracking peace negotiations in Vietnam by putting an end to the intransigence of both the North and South Vietnamese.

This dissertation does not position itself neatly between the pre-existing historiographical debates. The orthodox view of David Halberstam suggested that the Nixon administration was trying to achieve a victory in Vietnam.²⁰⁶ However, this dissertation has shown that the Nixon administration was transferring the burden of the war to the South Vietnam which would not suggest a U.S. victory was hoped for. Another orthodox view from

²⁰⁶ Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest*, p. 664-5

Jussi Hanhimaki argued that the U.S. did not achieve any real peace with honour.²⁰⁷ However, this dissertation has argued that linkage and Vietnamization were honourable ways to encourage a peace agreement and Operation Linebacker II ended the intransigence of the North Vietnamese and soon after led to a peace agreement. Revisionist, Michael Lind recognised the importance of military operations in bringing about a peace agreement, however he also argued that it was necessary to preserve American credibility.²⁰⁸ In contrast, post-revisionist Gabriel Kolko argued that a military solution would have a limited impact and that diplomacy was the last available solution for the Nixon administration.²⁰⁹ The argument of this dissertation corresponds with the revisionist argument that Operation Linebacker II was significant in reaching a peace agreement, however there is evidence to suggest that it was a combination of both diplomatic and military tactics that made had the most impact on spurring on negotiations. This argument supports a statement made by Henry Kissinger; he argued: ‘it was diplomacy, after all, tedious years of it that had produced the very agreement... But it had not been diplomacy in a vacuum. Military pressure had been an important component.’²¹⁰ Linkage improved diplomatic international relations, Vietnamization increased the strength of the South Vietnamese so that American troops could be withdrawn and Operation Linebacker II forced the North Vietnamese back to the negotiating table. Therefore, this dissertation has argued that the combination of diplomatic negotiations and the bombing campaign were the best way for the Nixon administration to achieve ‘peace with honor’ for America and Vietnam. This dissertation does not intend to suggest that linkage, Vietnamization and Operation Linebacker II were decisive factors in

²⁰⁷ Hanhimaki, *Flawed Architect*, p. 230

²⁰⁸ Lind, *Vietnam*, p. 39

²⁰⁹ Kolko, *Anatomy of War*, p. 355

²¹⁰ Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War*, p. 460

influencing the North Vietnamese decision to proceed with negotiations. However, as a combination they were likely to have had an impact on Hanoi.

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