Operation LINEBACKER II: A Retrospective
PART 2: Political Climate Leading Up to LINEBACKER II
With an Introduction to the Series

Report of the LSU Shreveport unit for the SAC Symposium, December 2, 2017

Gary D. Joiner, PhD.
Ashley E. Dean

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President/Founder
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QUOTES

Every SAM in Hanoi went off—just a fantastic barrage of SAMS!...and then the bombs started to hit...It was a continuous din of noise and shaking of the ground...We had a panoramic view over the courtyard roof of the prison...You could see the flashes of explosions on the overcast...they just keep coming and kept coming!...a constant barrage of sound, flash, and concussion...An awesome display of power...We were just pasting hell out of them for the first time.¹

_Capt Bob Lilly, Prisoner-of-War (POW), 1965-1973_

The first few times I experienced a B-52 attack it seemed, as I strained to press myself into the bunker floor, that I had been caught in the Apocalypse. The terror was complete. One lost control of bodily functions as the mind screamed incomprehensible orders to get out.²

_The Viet Cong Minister of Justice Truong Nhu Tang_

At the heart of warfare lies doctrine. It represents the central beliefs for waging war in order to achieve victory. Doctrine is of the mind, a network of faith and knowledge reinforced by experience which lays the pattern for the utilization of men, equipment, and tactics. It is the building material for strategy. It is fundamental to sound judgment.

_General Curtis Emerson LeMay, 1968_

The purpose of surprise is to strike at a time or place or in a manner for which the enemy is unprepared. Surprise can help the commander shift the balance of combat power and thus achieve success well out of proportion to the effort expended...³

_Joint Publication 3.0 Doctrine for Joint Operations_

We have the power to destroy his war making capacity. The only question is whether we have the will to use that power. What distinguishes me from [former President] Johnson is I have the will in spades.⁴

_Richard Nixon to Henry Kissinger_

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¹ Luse Shackelford, and Ray, "Eleven Days in December: Linebacker II" (USAF Southeast Asia Monograph Series, Air University, 1977), V.
One more observation needs to be made, which goes to the very heart of the matter. Only the commander who imposes his will can take the enemy by surprise.\textsuperscript{5}

\textit{Carl von Clausewitz}

The first, the supreme, the most far-reaching act of judgment that the statesman and the commander have to make is [rightly to understand] the kind of war on which they are embarking, neither mistaking it for, nor trying to turn it into, something that its alien to its nature. This is the first of all strategic questions and the most comprehensive.\textsuperscript{6}

\textit{Carl von Clausewitz}

The bastards have never been bombed like they’re going to be bombed this time.\textsuperscript{7}

\textit{President Richard M. Nixon, May 1972}

In any two-week period you mention.\textsuperscript{8}

\textit{General Curtis LeMay, July 1986, when asked if the United State could have won in Vietnam.}

I never said we should bomb them back to the Stone Age. I said we had the capability to do it.\textsuperscript{9}

\textit{General Curtis LeMay}

In war there is never any chance for a second mistake.

\textit{Lamachus, 465-414 B.C.E.}

\textsuperscript{6} Clausewitz, \textit{On War}, 89.
\textsuperscript{7} Richard Nixon, statement to White House Chief of Staff H. R. Haldeman and Attorney General John Mitchell, April 4, 1972.
\textsuperscript{8} Interview of Curtis LeMay by Manny-Ann Bendel, \textit{USA Today}, July 23, 1986, 9A.
ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Gary D. Joiner, Ph.D.

Dr. Gary Joiner received a B.A. in history and geography and a M.A. in history from Louisiana Tech University and a Ph.D. in history from St. Martin’s College, Lancaster University in the United Kingdom. He is a professor of History at Louisiana State University in Shreveport and serves as the Chair of the Department of History and Social Sciences, where he holds the Mary Anne and Leonard Selber Professorship in History. He is the director at the Strategy Alternatives Consortium (SAC) LSUS and the Red River Regional Studies Center.

Dr. Joiner is the principal author of prior SAC LSUS White Papers, including *OPERATION SENIOR SURPRISE: The Secret Squirrels and the opening of Operation DESERT STORM, 9/11: A Brief History and Case Study of America’s Worst Terrorist Attack*, and *Deterrence: A Brief History and a Case Study in Cold War Practice, Part I: 1945-1953*. He is the author and editor of thirty-four books, including: *History Matters, Shiloh and the Western Campaign of 1862, One Damn Blunder from Beginning to End, Through the Howling Wilderness, The Red River Campaign: The Union’s Last Attempt to Invade Texas, No Pardons to Ask or Apologies to Make, Little to Eat and Thin Mud to Drink, Mr. Lincoln’s Brown Water Navy, The Battle of New Orleans: a Bicentennial Tribute, Red River Steamboats, Historic Shreveport-Bossier, Lost Shreveport: Vanishing Scenes from the Red River Valley, Historic Haunts of Shreveport, Historic Oakland Cemetery, Wicked Shreveport, and Legendary Locals of Shreveport*. Dr. Joiner is also the author of numerous articles and technical reports, and has served as a consultant for ABC, the Associated Press, A&E Network, C-SPAN, the Discovery Network, Fox News, HGTV, the History Channel, MSCBC, MTV, SyFy Channel, and Louisiana Public Broadcasting, among others.

Ashley E. Dean

Ashley Dean received her B.A. in history and M.A. in Liberal Arts from Louisiana State University in Shreveport. She was the graduate researcher for SAC LSUS and is now the full time Assistant Director for the Consortium. She has co-authored and edited prior SAC LSUS White Papers, including *OPERATION SENIOR SURPRISE: The Secret Squirrels and the opening of Operation DESERT STORM, 9/11: A Brief History and Case Study of America’s Worst Terrorist Attack*, and *Deterrence: A Brief History and a Case Study in Cold War Practice, Part I: 1945-1953*. She recently published *Victorian to Victorious: Women in the American Civil War* in the 2016 edition of *Janus*, the journal of historical research published by the Department of History and Social Sciences at LSUS.
PREFACE

The Strategy Alternatives Consortium at Louisiana State University in Shreveport (SAC LSUS) created a series of essays to commemorate the forty-fifth anniversary of the Operation LINEBACKER II, which, for America, all but ended the Vietnam War. These essays have been combined into a White Paper. All seven essays and the White Paper are available, free of charge, on the SAC LSUS website – www.lsus.edu/sac. The purpose is to assist professors, high school teachers, Air Force Association chapters, and ROTC units understand the campaign and put it in context of the time and the consequence it made in Air Force doctrine and subsequent political/military decisions.

Operation LINEBACKER II marked a seminal point in the Vietnam War. The campaign, sometimes referred to as “The Eleven-Day War,” brought the North Vietnamese, with sincerity, back to the peace talks in Paris and all but destroyed their ability to wage a defensive war against American Airpower. Most historians and strategists agree that LINEBACKER II was a tremendously successful endeavor. There are some dissenters, who point to a lack of significant targets.

This series of essays examines the literature, the role of participants, presidential administrations, and military commanders and planners to provide an overarching examination of LINEBACKER II. They also provide both orthodox and dissenting opinions so that the reader may make up his or her mind concerning the subject.

The chapters cover a brief examination of the campaign, a discussion of the political climate from the end of World War II to through the decisions to execute Operation LINEBACKER and LINEBACKER II, an examination of strategic bombardment theory from World War II to the early years of the Vietnam War, strategic assets and micromanagement of those assets between 1965 and 1972, Operation LINEBACKER I, Operation LINEBACKER II, and, finally, the consequences and change in strategic thought brought forward by the campaigns.

The authors, Gary D. Joiner, Ph.D. and Ashley E. Dean, wish to thank Lane Callaway, the Eighth Air Force Historian, the good folks who handle the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests at Barksdale Air Force Base, Louisiana and Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama, for their often as for requests, and Lieutenant General Robert Elder (USAF retired) for guidance in this project.

Gary D. Joiner
Director, SAC LSUS
Louisiana State University in Shreveport
November 5, 2017
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AAA</td>
<td>Anti-Aircraft Artillery</td>
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<tr>
<td>AAD</td>
<td>Anti-Aircraft Defenses</td>
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<td>AAF</td>
<td>Army Air Force (United States)</td>
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<td>AB</td>
<td>Air Base</td>
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<td>ABM</td>
<td>Anti-ballistic Missile</td>
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<td>ACC</td>
<td>Air Combat Command</td>
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<td>ADC</td>
<td>Air Defense Command</td>
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<td>AEC</td>
<td>Atomic Energy Commission</td>
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<td>AFA</td>
<td>Air Force Association</td>
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<td>AFB</td>
<td>Air Force Base</td>
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<td>AFGSC</td>
<td>Air Force Global Strike Command</td>
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<td>AFM</td>
<td>Air Force Manual</td>
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<tr>
<td>ALCM</td>
<td>Air launched cruise missile</td>
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<td>ARVN</td>
<td>Army of the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnamese national army)</td>
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<tr>
<td>BARCAP</td>
<td>Barrier Combat Air Patrols</td>
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<tr>
<td>BDA</td>
<td>Bomb Damage Assessment</td>
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<td>BW</td>
<td>Bomb Wing (USAF)</td>
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<tr>
<td>CALCM</td>
<td>Conventional air launched cruise missiles</td>
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<td>CENTCOM</td>
<td>Central Command (US)</td>
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<td>CH</td>
<td>CORONA HARVEST</td>
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<td>CIA</td>
<td>Central Intelligence Agency</td>
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<td>CINCPAC</td>
<td>Commander US Military Assistance Command Pacific</td>
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<td>COMUSMACV</td>
<td>Commander US Military Assistance Command Vietnam</td>
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<tr>
<td>CONUS</td>
<td>Continental United States</td>
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<td>DEW</td>
<td>Defense Early Warning (radar system)</td>
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<td>DIA</td>
<td>Defense Intelligence Agency</td>
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<td>DMZ</td>
<td>demilitarized zone</td>
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<td>DOD</td>
<td>Department of Defense</td>
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<td>DOE</td>
<td>Department of Energy</td>
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<td>DRVN</td>
<td>Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam)</td>
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<td>ECM</td>
<td>electronic counter-warfare measures</td>
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<td>ELINT</td>
<td>electronic intelligence</td>
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<td>EW</td>
<td>Electronic Warfare</td>
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<td>EWO</td>
<td>Electronic Warfare Officer</td>
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<td>FAS</td>
<td>Federation of American Scientists</td>
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<tr>
<td>HE</td>
<td>high explosive</td>
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<td>ICBM</td>
<td>Intercontinental Ballistic Missile</td>
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<td>IP</td>
<td>Initial Point</td>
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<td>IRBM</td>
<td>Intermediate Range Ballistic Missile</td>
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<tr>
<td>ISIS</td>
<td>Islamic State of Iraq and Syria</td>
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<tr>
<td>JCS</td>
<td>Joint Chiefs of Staff</td>
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<tr>
<td>LGM</td>
<td>laser guided munitions</td>
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<td>MACV</td>
<td>Military Assistance Command, Vietnam</td>
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<td>MAD</td>
<td>Mutually Assured Destruction</td>
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<td>MAJCOM</td>
<td>Major Command</td>
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<td>MiG CAP</td>
<td>MiG Combat Air Patrol</td>
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<tr>
<td>MIRVs</td>
<td>multiple independently targeted vehicles</td>
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<tr>
<td>MIT</td>
<td>Massachusetts Institute of Technology</td>
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<tr>
<td>NATO</td>
<td>North Atlantic Treaty Organization</td>
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<td>NSC</td>
<td>National Security Council</td>
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<td>NSM</td>
<td>National Security Memorandum</td>
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NVA- North Vietnamese Army (North Vietnamese communist national army)
NVN- North Vietnam
PACAF- Pacific Air Forces
PAVN- People’s Army of Vietnam (North Vietnamese communist national army)
PGM- Precision guided munitions
POL- Petroleum Oil and Lubricants
PRC- Peoples Republic of China
PTT- Post Target Turn
ROE- Rules of engagement
RP- Route Package
RT- Radar Troops
RTNAB- Royal Thai Naval / Air Base
SAC- Strategic Air Command
SAM- Surface to Air Missile
SAM-2- Surface to Air Missiles, model 2
SEA- Southeast Asia
SECAF- Secretary of the Air Force (U.S.)
SIOP- Single Integrated Operational Plan
SLBM- Submarine Launced Ballistic Missile
TAC- Tactical Air Command
TACAIR- Tactical Aircraft, Tactical Air, or Tactical Air Forces
TOT- Times on Target
UN- United Nations
UNSC- United Nations Security Council
USAFF- United States Army Air Force
USAF- United States Air Force
USS- United States Ship

USSBS- United States Strategic Bombing Survey
USSR- Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
VC- Viet Cong (guerilla communist force that cooperated with the PAVN/NVA)
WMD- Weapons of Mass Destruction
PART 1

SERIES INTRODUCTION: OPERATION LINEBACKER II

In December 1972, in what was hoped to be the final weeks of the Vietnam War, President Richard M. Nixon ordered a massive bombing campaign against North Vietnam. The military campaign had strictly political origins. The Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) recommended in 1964 that North Vietnam be bombed and determined 94 targets that would wreck their ability to wage war[^10]. President Lyndon B. Johnson, Secretary of Defense, Robert S. McNamara, and Secretary of State Dean Rusk balked at the idea, fearing a Chinese invasion as in Korea[^11]. This set the stage for civilian micromanagement of the military conduct of the war, troop strength, selection of targets, rules of engagement (ROE), and, to many commanders, observers and historians, the primary reason the war descended into the chaos that it became[^12]. McNamara, in his position since 1961 and never popular with the military, became a pariah to the JCS and the commanders who followed his orders[^13].

North Vietnam invaded South Vietnam earlier that year using standard military tactics rather than guerrilla warfare. They hoped to take over the South Vietnamese government before U.S. forces, (deep into troop draw-downs) could hold them back. A series of long drawn out negotiations in Paris frustrated the Americans and the South Vietnamese. On December 13, North Vietnam suspended negotiations that attempted to establish a cease-fire agreement and return U.S. prisoners of war[^14]. At the same time, the U.S. Congress, tired of the political consequences of the war, determined to cut off funding for Southeast Asia military operations when members returned to Washington D.C. from their holiday recess in January 1973[^15].

The bombing campaign, known as Operation LINEBACKER II, began on December 18 and lasted for 11 days. Air Force Strategic Air Command (SAC) B-52 bombers flew 729 sorties,

[^12]: Kohn and Harahan, Strategic Air Warfare, 121.
[^14]: Henry Kissinger, White House Years (Boston, 1979), 717-744.
and U.S. Navy and Air Force Tactical Air Command (TAC) fighter-bombers flew 1,000 sorties.\textsuperscript{16} The SAC bombers, naval fighter-bombers, and TAC aircraft dropped 20,370 tons of bombs on North Vietnam.\textsuperscript{17} They destroyed command and control structures, power generating plants, railroad marshalling yards and trackage, and destroyed military airfields, surface to air missile (SAM) assembly and storage facilities. At the end of the campaign, North Vietnam was largely in the dark, very low on ammunition, and had exhausted its supply of SAMs.\textsuperscript{18} Although additional missions were planned and preparations made, President Nixon halted the bombing on December 29.\textsuperscript{19} North Vietnam, without replenishment from China and the Soviet Union, agreed to return to negotiations in earnest. The results were merely a formality. The cease-fire agreement was signed on January 23, 1973 by Henry Kissinger for the United States and Le Due Tho for North Vietnam.\textsuperscript{20}

Operation LINEBACKER II’s strategy and tactics remain the topic of discussion and planning today, forty-five years later. It proved that the Air Force commanders’ concept of ending the war in 1965 would work militarily, but largely due to the threat of Chinese intervention, was nullified. Once the JCS and Air Force commanders could set targets themselves and not answer to the White House staff (within reason), destruction of the North Vietnamese will and capacity to wage became evident. The operation also led to unanticipated consequences. SAC lost much of its prestige due to its inflexibility. Beliefs in bomber stream formation from World War II and Korea for conventional bombing missions proved problematic for SAC crews who were trained to follow orders blindly in their nuclear combat roles. Iron bombs soon gave way to precision guided weapons. The vulnerability of the B-52s to SAMs quickly led to changes in tactics, mission concepts, and a reduction in the numbers of the heavy bombers. More senior commanders were chosen from the ranks of the fighter pilots.\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 91-167.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{20} Henry Kissinger, \textit{White House Years} 740-744.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


PART 2

Political Climate Leading up to LINEBACKER II

No study or analysis of Operation LINEBACKER II should be conducted without a discussion of the political climate that preceded it, not only in the months before the missions in December 1972, but the philosophy of why to use heavy strategic bombers in a limited war that had few legitimate targets. This discussion will set the stage for further reading and examination, but will not provide an exhaustive digest of resources to present the topic fully.

The Strategic Air Command as the Ultimate Strategic Deterrent

The political climate of the use of strategic airpower prior to the Vietnam War (or Second Indochina War) is rooted in the months following the end of World War II. The Strategic Air Command (SAC) predated the establishment of the United States Air Force (USAF). SAC was a Major Command (MAJCOM) in the Air Force, but simultaneously a Specified Command under the Department of Defense. It was responsible for the training and billeting of heavy bomber crews and their aircraft, delivery of all atomic weapons in the case of war, and ultimately, the defense of the continental United States (CONUS). As technology rapidly progressed and over time, SAC also controlled Air Force refueling squadrons, strategic reconnaissance aircraft, intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) and airborne command posts. Refueling squadrons were later taken out of wings and formed into their own wing structure. It encompassed three numbered air forces, the Second Air Force, the Eighth Air Force, and the Fifteenth Air Force and several air divisions were assigned to these numbered Air Forces. SAC also originally housed fighter-bomber aircraft units, all of which were designed to deliver nuclear weapons.

SAC’s scope of mission, high degree of readiness, and almost cult-like status began on October 19, 1948, when Lieutenant General Curtis LeMay was appointed its commander. At the time of the command change, SAC possessed sixty B-29 nuclear-capable bombers, none of which could strike the Soviet Union from their CONUS bases. LeMay built SAC into an extraordinarily organization. He placed his personal stamp on all activities from training, housing, aircraft development and acquisition, Congressional actions on needs and, above all, budgets. President Harry Truman entrusted LeMay to create the core documents specifying how to wage the next war, which was believed to be nuclear and against the Soviet Union. LeMay’s response was to create the Emergency War Plan 1-49 (EWP 1-49). The plan outlined a sustained attack on the Soviets which would deliver 133 atomic bombs on 70 cities over a 30-day period.

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22 SAC was established (stood up) on March 21, 1946. It transferred to the USAF on the same day that this new independent military service on September 18, 1947.
exhaust the entire atomic bomb inventory, but LeMay was confident that the Soviets would be annihilated. The Soviets had no practical means of deploying their munitions against the United States. LeMay became the arbiter for defense budgets, strategic doctrine, and force composition under four presidents. SAC demanded more and more resources, to the point where the Air Force even questioned the need for the Navy for force projection. The Navy lost the budget battle over whether to build a super aircraft carrier or to fund the B-36 intercontinental bomber. The SAC commander was unmoved by public sentiment and political pressure. LeMay’s primary, indeed only, mission was to provide the United States with the largest, best trained and equipped nuclear deterrent force possible. He believed he could prevent a nuclear war before it began. SAC crews were elite units. They trained constantly and innovation among the air crews was not discouraged, but eliminated. Every aspect of mission preparation, aircraft maintenance, crew performance, bombing results and post mission analysis was done by an extensive set of orders. Crews functioned together as a team, unless one or more crewmen were deemed unfit. At that point, the individual was demoted to a lower echelon and sometimes in rank. Spot promotions and demotions were authorized within SAC.

SAC’s fortunes rose with the rearmament brought on by the Korean War. Although a World War I style war with serious implications of communist intentions, President Harry Truman refused to declare war on North Korea, even after the intervention of Communist China. The United Nations and United States were guarantors of the South Korean government. The Communists captured the South Korean capital, Seoul, and Truman was forced to send in large numbers of troops as well as air and sea assets. SAC was the only command that could send bombers and fighters to the Far East, but could also send nuclear capable bombers to the United Kingdom as a forward base if the Russians decided to escalate the war.

The Korean War placed a tremendous strain on SAC. While supporting United Nations forces in Korea for conventional bombing support, SAC also increased its nuclear-capable units. These were B-50 and B-36 wings. The B-50s were essentially nuclear capable B-29s with jet assist and specialized bomb bays. Due to the very long range and weapons capacity of the B-36, stockpiles of nuclear weapons increased dramatically. Although the B-36 had tremendous range, its six propellers and four jet engines could not compete with the speed of pure jets. SAC obtained the first all jet bomber in the Air Force inventory with the B-47 and the mainstay B-52 was first delivered in 1955. The Korean War was considered something of an aberration to SAC planners.

29 Kohn and Harahan, Strategic Air Warfare, 84.
30 Ibid., 97.
LeMay did not want to send his bombers to Korea. He suggested that his B-29s should be sent into North Korea and carpet bomb their cities and, if needed, bomb Chinese positions in Manchuria.\textsuperscript{36} When told that he was ordered to send units to support United Nations forces, he sent two units with lower proficiency ratings. He often repeated his belief that his bombers were being used merely as “flying artillery.”\textsuperscript{37} The cardinal mission of SAC remained nuclear and the threat of overwhelming devastation to an enemy anywhere in the world. As intercontinental ballistic missiles entered their infancy, SAC made certain that all delivery vehicles that contained nuclear warheads were under its control. Beginning during the Truman Presidency and continuing through the Eisenhower terms, theorists, particularly with RAND Corporation authored policy and working papers on the problems with nuclear warfare. Among the best known of these strategists were Albert Wohlstetter,\textsuperscript{38} Bernard Brodie,\textsuperscript{39} and Herman Kahn.\textsuperscript{40} Their work influenced not only the National Security Council (NSC) and presidents, but also the senior Pentagon planners. SAC particularly benefited from their work.

\textbf{Budgets}

The new Eisenhower administration stressed military security, but with the caveat that it must be economically sound and not harm the private sector.\textsuperscript{41} The Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), in 1953, created war plans that overwhelmingly emphasized the Air Force and SAC in particular. The National Security Memorandum (NSM) 162/2 stated “Air power and nuclear weapons should provide the nation’s primary means of defense – plans should be developed to use nuclear weapons whenever desirable militarily.”\textsuperscript{42}

The military budget requests during President Eisenhower’s first term sky rocketed. SAC was the primary beneficiary. Eisenhower found that the demands of military needs were precariously balanced on what the country could afford.\textsuperscript{43} The President wrote in 1953 that he intended to eliminate “waste and duplication in the armed forces: and that “even in roles and missions-these last always at least [were] self assigned.”\textsuperscript{44}

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{36} Worden, \textit{Rise of the Fighter Generals}, 63.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{39} See Bernard Brodie, \textit{The Anatomy of Deterrence} (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, July 23, 1958), among many others.
\textsuperscript{43} Bowie and Immerman, \textit{Waging Peace}, 96-108.
\end{footnotes}
Aggravating this problem was the Soviet Union, which rapidly developed both atomic and hydrogen weapons and the means to deliver them.\textsuperscript{45} Knowledge of Soviet defenses was sparse at best, but the general belief was that missile silos and nuclear bomber airfields were thinly spread.\textsuperscript{46} SAC’s response to the burgeoning, but as yet immature, threat was to run “Fail Safe” missions. LeMay’s training regimen required every crew on alert status to launch when ordered in the belief that this might be “the Big One,” the onset of all-out thermonuclear war. This kept the crews sharp and a significant percentage of nuclear weapons aboard the ready alert status aircraft. Each bomber had a set of orders that were to be opened in the event that a “go code” was sent to them. If the code was not sent, the crew practiced for a mission in a secondary set of orders. The secret code told their crews their target and their navigation points. Fail-Safe missions typically consisted of six bombers and six tankers.\textsuperscript{47} The bombers in CONUS and depending upon the location of their home air bases, would typically fly a northern route, each plane separating into different courses depending upon their targets.\textsuperscript{48}

The primary results from strategic planning and operations were that SAC air crews moved away from massed bomber formation tactics that were standard operating procedures in World War II and, to a lesser extent, Korea and toward single aircraft operations with nuclear weapons. This demanded that crews adhere to standard rote orders with no room for innovation. The single aircraft training would have mixed results in the Vietnam War.

The Air Force and various intelligence assets identified possible targets within the Soviet Union and its allies that required exponentially more warheads and aircraft. Strategic theory moved into first strike capability, second strike survivability, and mutually assured destruction (MAD).\textsuperscript{49} The threat of Soviet ICBM production and weapons of huge magnitude forced the President to increase the number of U.S. warheads to 18,000 by the end of his administration. SAC’s targeting plans by 1961 projected huge overkill. Eisenhower was “shocked and angered” about the numbers.\textsuperscript{50} Eisenhower’s response to the perceived “missile gap” and “bomber gap,” brought forth by conservatives in the National Security Council, Congress, and think tanks such as RAND, was to go against the prevailing SAC concept and give the Navy a third leg in what would be known as the nuclear triad. Polaris missile submarines were built that could stay at sea for months at a time and run silently near or at their launch points. Their missiles were not intercontinental, but were intermediate range ballistic missiles (IRBMs) with a range of 1,000

\textsuperscript{45} Bowie and Immerman, \textit{Waging Peace}, 153-154. The first Soviet atomic bomb was exploded on August 29, 1949. The first hydrogen weapon was exploded on August 12, 1953. The first ICBM launch was on August 26, 1957.


\textsuperscript{47} The best non-governmental popular sources of these sequences are found in two movies – \textit{Fail Safe} and \textit{Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb}. Both opened in 1964.

\textsuperscript{48} Conversation with Philip Blaufuss, B-52 radar navigator, who participated in both Fail Safe and Vietnam missions including Linebacker II. Interviewed by Gary D. Joiner, Ph.D. and Ashley Dean on September 12, 2017.

\textsuperscript{49} Herman Kahn, a senior RAND Corporation theorist on nuclear warfare, was the father of the MAD theory. His most important work on the subject was \textit{On Thermonuclear War} (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1960).

nautical miles, in this case Submarine Launched Ballistic Missiles (SLBMs).\textsuperscript{51} This concept led to land theatre IRBM’s as well. At the end of the Eisenhower administration, SAC’s strategic bombers were still considered to be the most reliable and morally effective deterrent. If launched from their bases with orders to strike targets, the bombers could be recalled enroute should tensions de-escalate. In contrast, ICBMs once launched could not be recalled.

\textbf{The Kennedy Administration}

As ICBM’s matured as a weapon delivery system, the calculus changed. The new John F. Kennedy presidency decided that a change in defense spending must be made. Kennedy’s Secretary of Defense, Robert McNamara, was brilliant but short-sighted. The ex-Ford Motor Company executive saw his world view through the eyes of a pragmatic accountant, not looking ahead to eventualities, but only seeing immediate cost savings. McNamara advocated ICBMs as a cost-saving alternative. They were relatively inexpensive and thus were more affordable than manned bombers.\textsuperscript{52} He told a Senate Subcommittee in 1964: "What is the role of a [strategic] bomber," … "after you place 1.000 to 2,000 missiles on the Soviet Union? What do you have left to mop up? This is \textit{the} question. If it is not a mop-up operation, what is the role of the bomber?"\textsuperscript{53}

The Kennedy administration inherited a problem in Southeast Asia from the Eisenhower presidency, and, indirectly, from the French. The French were forced out of Vietnam after 1954 by Vietnamese nationalists. The leader, Ho Chi Minh, had been somewhat pro-Western, but was rejected and turned to Russia and China for aid. During the Red Scare era of McCarthyism, all communists were thought to be part of a monolithic block. The U.S. sent in military advisors but not massive numbers of ground troops. McNamara wrote in 1995:

\textit{Throughout the Kennedy Years, we operated on two premises, that ultimately proved \textit{contradictory}. One was that the fall of South Vietnam to Communism would threaten the security of the United States and the Western world. The other was that only the South Vietnamese could defend their nation, and that America should limit its role to providing training and logistical support. In line with that latter view, we actually began planning for the phased withdrawal of U. S. forces in 1963, a step adamantly opposed by those who believed it could lead to the loss of South Vietnam and, very likely, all of Asia.}\textsuperscript{54}

McCarthyism stripped the State Department of its best Asia experts. As the new administration looked at the growing problem in Indochina. It possessed few details and no in-region resources that could understand the state of affairs. As McNamara later recounted, “We

\textsuperscript{51} Federation of American Scientists (FAS) https://fas.org/nuke/guide/usa/slbm/a-1.htm
Retrieved September 16, 2017. With the deployment of the Polaris submarines in 1960, the United States had, for the first time, a triad of three redundant delivery platforms of nuclear weapons.
\textsuperscript{52} Kennett, “Strategic Bombardment,” 630.
also totally underestimated the nationalist aspect of Ho Chi Minh's movement. We saw him first as a Communist and only second as a Vietnamese nationalist.”

The Vietcong (South Vietnamese pro-communist guerrillas) intensified attacks on South Vietnam and, at the same time, North Vietnam sent their own guerrillas in to the south near the end of 1961. The U.S. responded by sending in more advisors and military materiel into South Vietnam. Troop numbers were low, but this small increase put America on a footing. At this point the United States was confronting communist ploys the Congo, in Berlin, and soon, in Cuba. It appeared that the corrupt president of South Vietnam, Ngo Dinh Diem, was the focus of communist activity. The Kennedy administration attempted to move him toward conciliation, but he rejected all efforts. The U.S. authorized a coup attempt against Diem. Diem was assassinated two weeks before Kennedy was assassinated in November 1963.

The Johnson Administration

The new president was Lyndon B. Johnson. He kept Kennedy’s team largely intact. McNamara remained Secretary of Defense, Dean Rusk remained Secretary of State, and his national security advisors. The advisors were split on how to handle the volatile situation in SEA. The new President received advise from both hard-line anti-communists and moderates who wanted to keep the region as more of a sideshow on the world state. Johnson moved within a few months to send massive amounts of troops to fight the communists. He erred on the side of fear that the Domino Theory would prevail and perhaps all of Asia would go communist. The coup leaders against Diem were themselves toppled by another coup.

President Johnson received the push he needed to send massive military support to South Vietnam in August 1964, when North Vietnamese patrol boats attacked two U.S. destroyers in the Gulf of Tonkin. As a result, Congress passed the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. This document became the chief tool in escalating the war. At the time, no one understood how it would be applied and to the extent to which it was used by the Johnson administration. Johnson won the November elections in a landslide that November. By the following July, the U.S. increased its troop strength in Vietnam from 23,000 to 175,000. The decision was not made in the public arena. Johnson brought former President Dwight Eisenhower to White House for a conference in February 1966, to ask for his opinion. Eisenhower told Johnson and his advisors that it might take eight full U.S. Army divisions to hold and drive out the communists from South Vietnam. He also told them “he

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55 Ibid.
57 The domino theory was a Cold War policy that believed that a communist government in one nation would inevitably lead to communist takeovers in neighboring states, each falling like a row of dominos. After the Vietnam War, the theory was discredited.
58 The Gulf of Tonkin Resolution or the Southeast Asia Resolution, Pub. L. 88–408, 78 Stat. 384, enacted August 10, 1964, was a joint resolution that the United States Congress passed on August 7, 1964, in response to the Gulf of Tonkin incident.
59 McNamara, In Retrospect, 105-125 192-94.
60 Ibid., 172-73.
hoped they would not be needed; but if they were, so be it.’ If the Chinese or Soviets threatened to intervene, he said, ‘We should pass the word back to them to take care lest dire results [i.e., nuclear strikes] occur to them.’

General William Westmoreland, the U.S. commander in Vietnam stated that he needed tens of thousands of additional troops and more later. He also advocated bombing North Vietnam. He got his wishes. McNamara was the principal conduit for these requests and the Secretary of Defense and the President began four-year day-to-day micromanagement of the war. Using conventional forces to fight guerrilla warfare became the new norm. Objectives were calibrated by targets destroyed in North Vietnam and disruption of traffic in the jungles along the main supply route, the Ho Chi Minh trail. Body counts became the primary factor in proving success. McNamara, approved by the President, set the pattern. Johnson often bragged that Those boys can’t hit an outhouse without my permission.” The bombing missions conducted by the Air Force, Navy, and Marine Corps were tightly constrained for the remainder of the Johnson Administration.

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61 McNamara, “We Were Wrong, Terribly Wrong”; McNamara, In Retrospect, 172-73.
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