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CITE: MAC 00547

12 JANUARY 1968

DTG : 121422Z

FROM: GENERAL WESTMORELAND COMUSMACV SAIGON

TO : GENERAL WHEELER CJCS WASH DC

ADMIRAL SHARP CINCPAC HAWAII

DECLASSIFIED

SUBJ: KHE SANH (U)

Authority May 830024
By ms, NARS, Date 5-9-84

REF: A. JCS 00343/111546Z JAN 68 (TS)

B. MAC 00276/071230Z JAN 68 TS)

C. MAC 00321/081259Z JAN 68 (TS)

1. I HAVE JUST RETURNED FROM A VISIT WITH GENERAL CUSHMAN DURING WHICH WE DISCUSSED CONTINGENCY PLANS FOR REINFORCING KHE SANH AND THE I CTZ WHICH IS PERTINENT TO YOUR INQUIRY IN REF A. GENERAL CUSHMAN HAS TWO USMC BNS (REINF) IN KHE SANH NOW AND CONTINGENCY PLANS FOR AUGMENTING THIS FORCE WITH AN ADDITIONAL USMC BN ON EIGHT HOUR NOTICE, FOLLOWED BY A SECOND BN ON TWELVE HOUR NOTICE, AND BY SLF FORCES. ADDITIONALLY, AND AS A RESULT OF THE ABOVE DISCUSSION, I HAVE DIRECTED HIM AS A MATTER OF FIRST PRIORITY TO ALERT A BRIGADE OF THE AMERICAL DIVISION TO MOVE INTO THE HUE/PHU BAI AREA. THIS CAN BE DONE QUICKLY WITH FIXED WING OR ROTARY WING AIRCRAFT.

2. AS A SECOND PRIORITY WE ARE PREPARED TO REINFORCE I CTZ IN THE HUE/PHU BAI, DANANG, OR CHU LAI AREAS IN THAT PRIORITY WITH ANOTHER BDE, EITHER FROM THE 101ST AIRBORNE DIVISION OR FROM THE 1ST CAV DIV (AM).

3. ADDITIONAL ACTIONS UNDERWAY INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING:

A. AS THE ROK MARINE BRIGADE MOVES INTO THE DANANG TAOR, ELEMENTS OF THE 1ST MARINE DIVISION ARE BEING RELEASED FOR DEPLOYMENT NORTH OF AI-VAN PASS. THIS IN TURN IS RELEASING ELEMENTS OF THE 3D

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MARINE DIVISION FOR MOVEMENT INTO QUANG TRI PROVINCE. TWO BNS OF THE ROK MARINE BDE HAVE COMPLETED THEIR MOVEMENT AND FOUR BNS OF THE 1ST MARINE DIV ARE NOW NORTH OF AI-VAN PASS. THIS MOVE WILL BE COMPLETE BY 31 JAN WITH FOUR ROK BNS IN THE DANANG TAOR AND FIVE 1ST MARINE DIV BNS NORTH OF THE PASS.

B. THE JGS HAS AGREED TO DEPLOY A TF OF TWO ABN BNS TO I CTZ O/A 15 JAN 68 BRINGING TO FOUR THE NUMBER OF ARVN ABN BNS IN I CTZ.

C. WE ARE DEVELOPING PRIORITY TARGETS (OPN NIAGARA, REF B) FOR A SUSTAINED ARC LIGHT CAMPAIGN, AUGMENTED BY TAC AIR, BEGINNING NOT LATER THAN 18 JAN. WE PLAN TO CONCENTRATE ON TARGETS IN RVN PRIOR TO TET WITH APPROXIMATELY 75 PERCENT OR MORE OF OUR TOTAL EFFORT. DURING AND FOLLOWING TET CEASE FIRE WE WILL STRIKE TARGETS IN LAOS. THIS OPERATION (NIAGARA) ALSO INCLUDES A SLAM TYPE OPERATION IN THE KHE SANH AREA BY 7TH AF. IN CONJUNCTION WITH OUR SUSTAINED ARC LIGHT CAMPAIGN I AM REQUESTING BY FRONT CHANNEL A FURTHER STEP UP IN THE B-52 ACCELERATED PROGRAM NOW SCHEDULED TO BEGIN 20 JAN.

D. WE ARE REQUESTING A CARRIER BE ALERTED TO BE BROUGHT IN TO AUGMENT TAC AIR, AND THE PROMPT RETURN OF THE SLF FOR COMMITMENT TO EITHER THE 3D OR 1ST MAR DIV AREAS.

E. MAXIMUM NUMBER OF NGF SUPPORT SHIPS WILL BE CONCENTRATED IN THE I CTZ.

4. REGARDING VIEW NUMBER ONE IN REF A: MY CONCEPT AND A TIME FRAME FOR OPERATIONS IN LAOS ARE OUTLINED IN A PROPOSED OPERATION (EL PASO) REF C. PREEMPTING A KHE SANH AREA ASSAULT BY AN OFFENSIVE INTO LAOS IS NEITHER LOGISTICALLY NOR TACTICALLY FEASIBLE AT THIS TIME. SIGNIFICANT CONSIDERATIONS INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING:

A. TO BE EFFECTIVE A LAOTIAN ASSAULT SHOULD BE LAUNCHED IN THE NEAR FUTURE.

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B. WITH THE NE MONSOON UPON US, LAUNCHING AND SUPPORTING THE MAGNITUDE OF FORCE ENVISIONED IS NOT WITHIN OUR CURRENT CAPABILITY. AN AIR LOC IS ESSENTIAL AND FLYING WEATHER IS MARGINAL. ADDITIONALLY, OUR AIRLIFT CAPABILITIES ARE INADEQUATE TO SUPPORT BOTH THIS CONCEPT AND AN ACCEPTABLE TACTICAL POSTURE IN OTHER RVN THREAT AREAS AT THIS TIME.

C. WE ESTIMATE SIZABLE ENEMY FORCES TO BE IN THE TCHEPONE AREA AND TO THE NORTH THEREOF; THUS A BRIEF SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGN THERE MAY NOT BE POSSIBLE.

D. AIR ASSAULTS INTO LAOS WEST OF KHE SANH WILL MOST PROBABLY ENCOUNTER HEAVY AA FIRE WHICH WE MIGHT NOT BE ABLE TO NEUTRALIZE IN A SHORT TIME FRAME.

5. WITH RESPECT TO VIEW NUMBER TWO REF A; THE FOLLOWING PARAGRAPHS ARE KEYED TO YOUR MESSAGE:

A. KHE SANH ROAD: TRUE, IT IS NOT NOW OPEN. IT CAN BE OPENED, AND DEFENDED; THOUGH WITH CONSIDERABLE DIFFICULTY DURING THE NE MONSOONS. ROUTE 9 IS NOT, HOWEVER, A DECISIVE ELEMENT IN OUR DEFENSE OF KHE SANH. WE CAN SUPPLY AND REINFORCE BY AIR.

B. CONTROL OF COMMANDING HIGHGROUND: AT THIS TIME, WE CONTROL THE FOLLOWING KEY HILLS AT KHE SANH: HILL 881 (XD777438), HILL 861 (XD803443), AND HILL 950 (XD843455). THOSE THAT ARE TACTICALLY ESSENTIAL WILL BE DEFENDED.

C. ENEMY ARTILLERY: WE HAVE ONLY ONE REPORT OF ARTILLERY THREATENING KHE SANH; AND THIS REPORT NOTES THE PRESENCE OF 75MM PACK ARTILLERY. THE ENEMY IS FACED WITH GREAT OBSTACLES IN THE MOVEMENT OF HEAVY EQUIPMENT IN THE WESTERN QUANG TRI TERRAIN. HOWEVER WE DO ANTICIPATE GREAT QUANTITIES OF MORTAR AND ROCKET FIRE.

D. WITHDRAWAL FROM KHE SANH: ALTHOUGH THIS AREA IS CRITICAL TO US FROM A TACTICAL STANDPOINT AS A LAUNCH BASE FOR SOUTH VIETNAM LIBRARY

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AS FLANK SECURITY FOR THE STRONG POINT OBSTACLE SYSTEM, IT IS EVEN MORE CRITICAL FROM A PSYCHOLOGICAL VIEW POINT. TO RELENGISH THIS AREA WOULD BE A MAJOR PROPAGANDA VICTORY FOR THE ENEMY. ITS LOSS WOULD SERIOUSLY AFFECT VIETNAMESE AND US MORALE. IN SHORT, WITHDRAWAL WOULD BE A TREMENDOUS STEP BACKWARDS.

E. COMUSMACV - LTG CUSHMAN RELATIONSHIP: WE HAVE NO PROBLEM HERE AND I REJECT OUT OF HAND ANY IMPLICATIONS TO THE CONTRARY. THIS IS ABSURD.

6. IN SUMMARY WITH RESPECT TO REF A I REGARD THE NON-MILITARY EXPRESSIONS AS TANTAMOUNT TO DESPERATION TACTICS ON THE ONE HAND, AND DEFEAT ON THE OTHER. NEEDLESS TO SAY SUCH ACTION WOULD FAVOR THE ENEMY WHO HIMSELF IS DESPERATE. ALTHOUGH THERE ARE THOSE IN NON MILITARY CIRCLES WHO FAVOR THE CONCEPT OF RETREATING INTO ENCLAVES, I MUST REITERATE THIS STRATEGY MERELY RETURNS THE CENTER OF VIOLENCE TO THE MIDST OF THE RVN PEOPLE IN THE POPULATED CENTERS. ON THE OTHER HAND, A MASSIVE ASSAULT INTO LAOS IS NOT FEASIBLE IN THE NEAR TIME FRAME.

7. IN VIEW OF THE ENEMY CAPABILITY TO INITIATE A MAJOR OFFENSIVE IN QUANG TRI PROVINCE BEFORE TET I WOULD PREFER TO DEFEND WITH FORCE DEPLOYMENT AND COMBAT SUPPORT AS INDICATED ABOVE. I WILL SUBMIT ADDITIONAL SUPPORT REQUIREMENTS BY FRONT CHANNEL FOR ARC LIGHT, CARRIER AND NGF SUPPORT.

8. AS I FILE THIS MESSAGE, ANOTHER THOUGHT OCCURS TO ME WHICH I TAG ON. I BELIEVE THE TIME HAS ARRIVED TO DECLASSIFY AND EMPLOY COFRAM. I RECOMMEND THAT THE JCS ACT ON THIS MATTER AND THAT IT BE AUTHORIZED FOR USE IN THE UNPOPULATED AREAS OF I CORPS.

WARM REGARDS.