

Pres file

February 9, 1968
Friday, 6:20 P.M.

Mr. President:

Here is General Westmoreland's latest estimate of the situation and his future strategy.

I understand General Wheeler has spoken to you on the phone about this message.

W. W. Rostow

BKS/lamc

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O 091633Z ZYM ZFF-1

FM GEN WESTMORELAND CONUSMACV SAIGON

TO GEN WHEELER CJCS WASH

ADM SHARP CINCPAC HAWAII

DECLASSIFIED

Authority CSA 11-22-78

By sp/18, NARA, Date 2-3-92

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REFERENCES: A. JCS 01590, DTG 090021Z

B. CINCPAC DTG 090359Z

1. (U) SINCE REFERENCES A AND B CONCERN THE SAME GENERAL SUBJECT, I WILL ANSWER THEM COLLECTIVELY.

2. (S) TO PUT THE SITUATION IN CONTEXT, IT MIGHT BE DESIRABLE TO GIVE YOU MY VIEWS OF THE ENEMY'S STRATEGY AND THE PLANS THAT HE DEVELOPED IN HANOI DURING EARLY FALL. IT WOULD SEEM THAT THE ENEMY CONCLUDED THAT A PROTRACTED WAR WAS NOT IN HIS LONG-RANGE INTEREST IN VIEW OF THE SUCCESS OF OUR GROUND AND AIR ACTIONS AGAINST HIS FORCES, SUPPLIES, AND FACILITIES. HE THEREFORE DECIDED TO ADOPT AN ALTERNATE STRATEGY TO BRING THE WAR TO AN EARLY CONCLUSION. STEMMING FROM THIS STRATEGY, THERE EVOLVED A PLAN THAT I RECONSTRUCT IN THREE PHASES. PHASE I, WHICH STARTED AT THE END OF OCTOBER AND WAS SCHEDULED TO GO UNTIL THE FIRST OF THE YEAR, HAD AS ITS OBJECTIVE THE SEIZURE OF SELECTED AREAS IN REMOTE PROVINCES ALONG THE LAO AND CAMBODIAN BORDERS AND CONSOLIDATION OF THESE AREAS PENDING FURTHER OPERATIONS TO EXPAND HIS AREA OF CONTROL. ALSO DURING THIS PHASE, HE PROCEEDED TO CONCENTRATE ON DISTRICT

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TO DISRUPT THE POLITICAL AND MILITARY CONTROL STRUCTURE OUTSIDE OF THE CITIES. DURING THIS PHASE, WE SAW THE MAJOR ATTACK ON DAK TO; ATTACKS BY FIRE ON KONTUM, PLEIKU, AND BAN ME THUOT; AND MAJOR GROUND ATTACKS AGAINST LOC NINH, BU DOP, AND SONG BE; AND ATTACKS AGAINST INNUMERABLE DISTRICT TOWNS AND OUTPOSTS. AS YOU KNOW, THIS PHASE ACHIEVED VERY LIMITED SUCCESS, RESULTED IN LARGE CASUALTIES TO THE ENEMY, AND A FAILURE TO PHYSICALLY CONTROL MORE TERRITORY IN SOUTH VIETNAM. AN ENCLAVE STRATEGY WOULD HAVE PLAYED INTO HIS HANDS. THE SECOND PHASE, WHICH WE SAW START AT TET, INVOLVED INFILTRATION OF CITIES TO DESTROY THE POLITICAL AND MILITARY CONTROL APPARATUS AND TO BRING ABOUT A PUBLIC UPRISING. IN THE BORDER AREAS, THIS PHASE WAS DESIGNED TO SUPPORT HIS PLAN TO SEIZE CONTROL OF PLEIKU AND DARLAC PROVINCES WHICH WOULD GIVE HIM DE FACTO CONTROL OF THE EASTERN PORTION OF THE COUNTRY FROM THE ASHAU VALLEY IN WESTERN THUA THIEN ALL THE WAY DOWN THROUGH WAR ZONE C IN NORTHERN TAY NINH. THE THIRD PHASE, WHICH IS YET TO BEGIN, WOULD INVOLVE CONSOLIDATION OF HIS POSITION AND STRONG ATTACKS ACROSS THE DMZ AND AGAINST KHE SANH WITH THE OBJECTIVE OF ESTABLISHING MILITARY CONTROL OVER THE TWO NORTHERN PROVINCES, THEREBY BRINGING ABOUT A DE FACTO PARTITION OF THE COUNTRY FROM WHEREIN HE WOULD CONTROL QUANG TRI AND THUA THIEN, WESTERN QUANG NAM, WESTERN QUANG TIN, AND THE PROVINCES OF KONTUM, PLEIKU, DARLAC, QUANG DUC, AND AT LEAST THE NORTHERN PORTIONS OF PHUOC LONG, BIEN LONG, AND TAY NINH. UNDER THE

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CIRCUMSTANCES, HE WOULD HAVE CREATED A SITUATION SIMILAR TO THAT WHICH NOW PREVAILS IN LAOS AND WOULD THEREFORE BE IN A STRONG NEGOTIATING POSITION, PARTICULARLY IF HE WERE SUCCESSFUL IN HIS DESIGN TO ASSUME CONTROL OF THE CITIES AND BRING ABOUT A PUBLIC UPRISING.

3. AS TO THE PRESENT SITUATION, AN ENEMY THREAT OF MAJOR PROPORTIONS IS STILL POSED NORTH OF THE DMZ AND AROUND KHE SANH. IN ADDITION, THE ENEMY IS APPLYING CONSIDERABLE PRESSURE TO THE HUE AREA AND TO HIGHWAY 1 NORTH OF DANANG. FURTHERMORE, HE HAS A NUMBER OF BATTALIONS DIRECTLY SOUTH OF DANANG WHICH POSE A THREAT TO THE AIR FIELD AND THE CITY. THE 3D MAR DIV IS IN GOOD POSTURE AT KHE SANH AND SOUTH OF THE DMZ. THE 1ST CAV DIV IS IN QUANG TRI PROVINCE WITH TWO BATTALIONS IN BLOCKING POSITIONS NORTH OF HUE. A MARINE REGIMENT IS SECURING HUE/PHU BAI AND ASSISTING IN THE CLEARING OF HUE CITY. THE MARINES HAVE MADE EXCELLENT PROGRESS, BUT THE GOING BY THE ARVN IN THE CITADEL HAS BEEN SLOW AND THEY WILL PROBABLY BE WITH IT FOR SEVERAL MORE DAYS. THE ROAD OVER AI VAN PASS IS CUT, WITH LITTLE PROSPECT OF BEING OPENED UNTIL ADDITIONAL TROOPS AND ENGINEERS CAN BE PROVIDED. BECAUSE OF THIS SITUATION, I AM DEPLOYING BY AIR TOMORROW A BATTALION OF THE 101ST ABN DIV TO HUE/PHU BAI TO ASSIST IN THE SECURITY OF THAT IMPORTANT AREA AND WILL BE MOVING OUT BY LST A SECOND BATTALION OF THE 101ST TO DANANG ON THE 12TH WITH THE MISSION OF PROVIDING SECURITY FOR HIGHWAY 1 OVER AI VAN PASS. ALSO I AM SENDING BY SEA AN ARMY COMBAT ENGINEER BATTALION TO WORK ON HIGHWAY 1. THE CONTROLLING FACTOR IN QUANG TRI AND THUA THIEN IS LOGISTICS, NOW MARGINAL AT BEST. IT IS ESSENTIAL THAT WE OPEN UP HIGHWAY 1 AND THE MA

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CANNOT SPARE THE FORCES TO DO THE JOB. THE SITUATION IN RUE SHOULD IMPROVE BECAUSE A TASK FORCE OF THREE VIETNAMESE MARINE BATTALIONS THAT ARE IN GOOD STRENGTH WILL BE REPLACING THE THREE UNDERSTRENGTH ABN BNS NOW FIGHTING IN THE CITY ALONG WITH ELEMENTS OF THE ARVN 1ST DIV.

4. THE SITUATION IN II CORPS IS GENERALLY FAVORABLE BUT THERE IS SOME FIGHTING WITH ENEMY ELEMENTS IN DALAT AND A SIZEABLE THREAT EXISTS AT DAK TO. I BELIEVE WE HAVE ENOUGH FORCES IN AT DAK TO, BUT ROSSON IS PREPARED TO REINFORCE WITH ELEMENTS OF THE 173D.

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ADM SHARP CINCPAC HAWAII

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5. IN III CORPS, FIGHTING CONTINUES IN SAIGON, BUT THIS SITUATION SHOULD BE CLEARED UP SHORTLY, DESPITE THE FACT THAT I EXPECT THE ENEMY TO INCREASE HIS EFFORT THERE IN THE NEXT SEVERAL DAYS. TODAY I DEPLOYED A US BATTALION IN THE AREA IN ORDER TO ENERGIZE THE ARVN AND TO PERMIT THEM TO REDEPLOY A BATTALION TO ANOTHER PART OF THE CITY. NORTH AND EAST OF SAIGON THERE ARE ELEMENTS OF THE 9TH AND 5TH VC DIVISIONS AND FURTHER NORTH WE HAVE THE 7TH NVA DIV. THE 5TH AND 9TH DIVISIONS HAVE BEEN HURT BY RECENT ACTIONS AND THEIR CAPABILITY IS CONSIDERED LIMITED. ON THE OTHER HAND, THE 7TH DIV IS IN FAIR SHAPE, BUT WE HAVE BEEN PUTTING THE PRESSURE ON THEM THROUGH GROUND RAIDS, ARTILLERY, AND AIR STRIKES DURING THE LAST WEEK, WHICH HAS PROBABLY DEGRADED THEIR CAPABILITY. WEYAND HAS SO DISPOSED HIS FORCES THAT THE ENEMY WILL HAVE DIFFICULTY GETTING AN ATTACK OFF THE GROUND AND COULD ONLY DO SO AT GREAT RISK. DURING THE LAST SEVERAL DAYS, SAIGON HAS BEEN REINFORCED BY TWO MARINE BATTALIONS WHICH WERE DEPLOYED FROM THE II CORPS. I AM PLANNING TO MOVE THE MOBILE RIVERINE FORCE INTO LONG AN ON THE 12TH AND IF NECESSARY CAN REINFORCE WITH TROOPS NOW IN THE IV CORPS ON SHORT NOTICE. FINALLY, THERE IS AN AIRBORNE BATTALION AT PHAN THIEP WHICH I CAN USE TO FURTHER REINFORCE IF REQUIRED. IN SUMMARY, DESPITE

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THE DEPLOYMENT OF TWO AIRBORNE BATTALIONS TO I CORPS, I FEEL THAT OUR POSTURE IN III CORPS IS ADEQUATE TO COPE WITH THE SITUATION.

IN IV CORPS, I NOW HAVE FIVE BATTALIONS ON THE 9TH DIV, TO INCLUDE THE MOBILE RIVERINE FORCE. THEY HAVE DONE AN EXCELLENT JOB AND IN MY OPINION HAVE SAVED THE SITUATION IN MY THOAND BEN TRE. YESTERDAY I PLANNED TO MOV THE MOBILE RIVERINE FORCE TO LONG AN ON THE 10TH, BUT BECAUSE OF CONTINUED ACTIVITY NEAR MY THO I HAVE DECIDED TO LEAVE THEM IN THAT AREA UNTIL THE 12TH.

S 6. THE ONLY REALLY SERIOUS THREAT THAT FACES ME NOW IS IN I CO AREA, WHERE WE ARE LIMITED BY LOGISTICS, WEATHER, THE CLOSURE OF HIGHWAY 1 AND ENEMY INITIATIVES. IT IS IMPORTANT THAT I REINFORCE SOONEST WITH A MINIMUM OF TWO BATTALIONS.

7. ONE OF THE PROBLEMS THAT CONCERNS ME IS THE SHORTAGE OF STRENGTH IN THE ARVN UNITS. THE SITUATION WAS BROUGHT ABOUT BY HIGH CASUALTIES DURING THE PAST WEEK AND ABSENTEES FROM THE UNITS BECAUSE OF TET. MOST OF THESE ABSENTEES WERE AUTHORIZED IN THAT LEAVES WERE PERMITTED AND THE TROOPS HAVE NOT BEEN ABLE TO GET BACK TO THEIR UNITS. ON THE OTHER HAND, I THINK WE MUST REALISTICALLY EXPECT DESERTIONS TO BE HIGH. IT IS GOING TO TAKE SOME TIME TO BUILD THE ARVN BACK UP TO STRENGTH. I HAVE EMPHASIZED THIS TO PRES. THIEU AND URGED THAT HE PROCEED IMMEDIATELY TO DRAFT 19-YEAR-OLDS, TO BE FOLLOWED AS NEEDED BY THE DRAFTING OF YOUTHS OF 18. FURTHERMORE, WE PLAN TO INCREASE THE VIETNAMESE ARMED FORCES BY 65,000, AND THIEU HAS RECENTLY ASKED IF WE CAN SUPPORT AN EVEN GREATER BUILD-UP. IN MY OPINION, WE WILL HAVE NO DIFFICULTY SUPPORTING ANY BUILD-UP THAT THEY CAN ACCOMPLISH. AFTER FILLING THEIR DEPLETED RANKS, I DOUBT

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THEIR ABILITY TO RECRUIT AND TRAIN UNITS BEYOND THE PLANNED STRENGTH INCREASE OF 65,000.

8. I HAVE NOW DEPLOYED TO I CORPS THE 1ST CAVDIV LESS A BRIGADE, PLUS A BRIGADE OF THE 101ST ABN DIV. I WILL BE DEPLOYING SHORTLY TWO ADDITIONAL BATTALIONS OF THE 101ST AND WILL BE PREPARED TO DEPLOY A THIRD BATTALION WITH A BRIGADE HEADQUARTERS AT A LATER TIME. IN MY OPINION, THIS IS THE MINIMUM FORCE THAT I WILL NEED TO INSURE STABILITY OF THE SITUATION IN THE TWO NORTHERN PROVINCES, BUT EVEN THIS MAY NOT BE ENOUGH. I MAY HAVE TO EMPLOY THE ENTIRE 101ST DIV AND AM PREPARED TO DO SO, DEPENDING UPON ENEMY ACTIONS. HOWEVER, LOGISTICS IS THE KEY AND THIS MEANS OPENING HIGHWAY 1. DURING THE NEXT SEVERAL MONTHS, I WOULD MOVE INTO THE ASHAU VALLEY AND CLEAN IT OUT AND TO OPEN UP THE ROAD TO KHE SANH. ON THE OTHER HAND, I WILL HAVE TO GIVE PRIORITY TO MOVING AGAINST THE ENEMY ONCE HE HAS COMMITTED HIMSELF. I AM NOT HAPPY ABOUT THINNING OUT III CORPS, BUT THE DEPARTURE OF THE 101ST WILL NOT PRESENT AN UNACCEPTABLE RISK; IT WILL SLOW DOWN PROGRESS THAT COULD OTHERWISE BE MADE IN DEFEATING MAIN FORCE UNITS IN THE AREA AND IN SUPPORTING PACIFICATION.

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9. NEEDLESS TO SAY, I WOULD WELCOME REINFORCEMENTS AT ANY TIME THEY CAN BE MADE AVAILABLE:

A. TO PUT ME IN A STRONGER POSTURE TO CONTAIN THE ENEMY'S MAJOR CAMPAIGN IN THE DMZ-QUANG TRI-THUA THIEN AREA AND TO GO ON THE OFFENSIVE AS SOON AS HIS ATTACK IS SPENT.

B. TO PERMIT ME TO CARRY OUT MY CAMPAIGN PLANS DESPITE THE ENEMY'S REINFORCEMENTS FROM NORTH VIETNAM WHICH HAVE INFLUENCED MY DEPLOYMENTS AND PLANS.

C. TO OFF-SET THE WEAKENED VIETNAMESE FORCES RESULTING FROM CASUALTIES AND TET DESERTIONS. REALISTICALLY, WE MUST ASSUME THAT IT WILL TAKE THEM AT LEAST SIX MONTHS TO REGAIN THE MILITARY POSTURE OF SEVERAL WEEKS AGO. I SHOULD POINT OUT IN THIS CONNECTION THAT WHEN ONE CONSIDERS THE CASUALTIES INFLICTED ON THE ENEMY, THIS IS NOT AN EXPECTED PRICE TO PAY.

D. TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE ENEMY'S WEAKENED POSITION BY GOING ON THE OFFENSIVE AGAINST HIM.

10. IF THE ONE-HALF MARINE DIVISION WERE MADE AVAILABLE NOW, I WOULD OF COURSE ASSIGN IT TO III MAF, FOR EITHER NORTH OF DANANG OR IN QUANG TIN PROVINCE THEREBY RELEASING ELEMENTS OF THE AMERICAN DIVISION FOR DEPLOYMENT FURTHER SOUTH. IF THE 82D ABN DIV WERE

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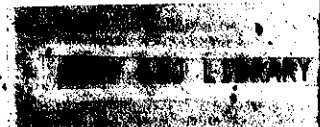
AVAILABLE NOW, I WOULD WANT IT TO ARRIVE AT DANANG AND BE DEPLOYED NORTH IN THE AI VAN PASS AND THENCE TO THE HUE/PHU BAI AREA FOR POSSIBLE OPERATIONS IN BASE AREA 117 AND LATER PERHAPS IN BASE AREA 101. THIS DIVISION WOULD OPERATE IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE 1ST CAV DIV. SUBSEQUENTLY, ALONG WITH THE 1ST CAV DIV, AND ELEMENTS OF THE III MAF, IT COULD EFFECT A LAND LINK-UP WITH KHE SANH AND THENCE MOVE INTO THE A SHAH VALLEY AND CLEAN IT OUT. (YORK II) THE SEQUENCE OF OBJECTIVES WOULD BE DETERMINED AFTER CONSIDERING THE FACTORS AT THE TIME. I ENVISION THE 82D WOULD MOVE BY FOOT AND ROAD TO THE EXTENT POSSIBLE SO AS TO ECONOMIZE ON THE USE OF HELICOPTERS. SUCH DEPLOYMENT WOULD PERMIT ME TO RELIEVE ELEMENTS, IF NOT ALL, OF THE 101ST ABN DIV TO RETURN TO THE III CORPS TO ASSIST IN OPERATIONS THERE.

WHEN WEATHER PERMITS, IT WILL BE DESIRABLE, IF NOT ESSENTIAL TO ESTABLISH A BEACH SUPPORT AREA SOUTH OF QUANG TRI.

THIS IS THE MOST EFFECTIVE AND ECONOMICAL WAY OF PROVIDING LOGISTICAL SUPPORT TO THE AREA. IT WILL BE FEASIBLE TO SUPPORT THE 82D INITIALLY FROM DANANG ALONG HIGHWAY 1, PROVIDE NECESSARY TROOPS ARE COMMITTED TO KEEP THE ROAD OPEN. WITH THE COMMITMENT OF SUCH TROOPS, IT MIGHT ALSO BE PRACTICAL TO PUT THE RAILROAD IN OPERATION AND THIS WOULD FURTHER INCREASE THE TONNAGE. HOWEVER, I DO NOT YET HAVE A SURVEY AS TO THE COSTS AND TIME INVOLVED IN OPENING RAILROAD, BUT I DO NOT BELIEVE IT WOULD BE A MAJOR TASK.

11. IN SUMMARY, I WOULD MUCH PREFER A BIRD IN THE HAND THAN TWO IN THE BUSH, BUT WOULD LIKE THE BIRDS TO BE DEPLOYED TO THE I CORPS AREA AND NOT IN THE II CORPS OR III CORPS. ELEMENTS THAT I HAVE HAD

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TO DEPLOY FROM III CORPS COULD PERHAPS BE RETURNED AND THEREFORE
EXPAND OUR OPERATIONS IN THAT AREA. IT IS CONCEIVABLE THAT A SIX-MONTH
LOAN OF THESE UNITS WOULD TURN THE TIDE TO THE POINT WHERE THE ENEMY
MIGHT SEE THE LIGHT OR BE SO WEAKENED THAT WE COULD RETURN THEM,
PARTICULARLY IF THE ARVN CAN REBUILD ITSELF FOLLOWING ITS RECENT
BATTLES AND IMPROVES ITS FIGHTING QUALITY BY VIRTUE OF THE MODERN
WEAPONS IT IS SCHEDULED TO RECEIVE.

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