

**TOP SECRET**

Mon, February 12, 1968  
11:45 a.m.

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MR. PRESIDENT:

For what it may be worth, here are my thoughts.

1. As Westy said today, and you understood for a long time, the enemy decided to abandon his attritional strategy and go for broke. In strategic terms, Saigon and Washington understood this. Tactically, it was understood with respect to I Corps and the DMZ Offensive. What was not understood and budgeted for was an attack on the cities and towns on the scale, with the concentration, and with the timing that it occurred.

2. The enemy failed in his maximum objective. But he achieved these secondary objectives:

- he shook U. S. public opinion;
- he shook world opinion;
- he shook the governmental structure;
- he shook the RF and PF and imposed high casualties on the ARVN;
- he forced a significant piecemeal diversion of Westy's slim reserve forces for the I Corps offensive.

3. He now evidently hopes to force a major setback on us in I Corps while continuing to harass the cities, pick up pieces of the countryside, and prevent Westy from concentrating sufficient force in I Corps.

4. So far as U. S. and world opinion are concerned, there is only one satisfactory answer: a clear defeat of the enemy in I Corps, while rallying the South Vietnamese to get back on their feet elsewhere. Moreover, I Corps is -- or should be -- our kind of battle. It has guerrilla elements, but is much more nearly conventional war. It should be our kind of war if Westy is not strapped for men, aircraft, and supplies.

5. Only such a demonstration is likely to permit us to end the war on honorable terms.

6. Therefore, I am for a very strong response to Westy's cable. Only you can make the political assessment of what it would cost to call up the reserves; but that would be the most impressive demonstration to Hanoi and its friends.

7. As for the issue Clark Clifford raised -- how do you explain this in terms of past statements of progress -- I believe the outline for a talk I gave you yesterday handles it with one exception.

We begin by explaining the kind of rural war it was since 1965 and the

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progress we were making. Evidently, Hanoi decided that this attritional war was not moving its way: they were losing population; a legitimate constitutional government was being created. They thought their position would be worse a year from now than at present.

Therefore, they designed this go-for-broke offensive. We knew about it; but they achieved tactical surprise in the cities.

They failed at the frontier (Loc Ninh and Dak To).

They hit the government and ARVN and urban population hard;  
but they failed.

Now they are rounding on I Corps; and we're not going to let them have it.

We are sending men to assure Westy the reserves he needs; we are calling up reserves to make sure no one gets the idea that we can't handle our other world commitments.

W. W. Rostow

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