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THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20301

NODIS

CM-3003-68
12 February 1968

57a

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

Subject: Reinforcements for South Vietnam

1. General Westmoreland's message (MAC 01975) which I furnished to you earlier today is not in response to a message I sent to him last night, copy of which is attached hereto. General Westmoreland is drafting now a response to my message.

2. General Westmoreland repeated over the telephone to me at 0815 hours the gist of his earlier message; namely, he believes the VC struck out in Phases 1 and 2 of their offensive. He considers he has opportunities available to exploit the enemy's failures. He needs soonest one brigade of the 82d Airborne Division and a Marine Corps Regiment. He considers that he can hold off on a decision to request the remainder of the 82d Airborne Division and the other three battalions of Marines until later. He can absorb logistically the troops that he asks for now. It is conceivable that the troops he asks for will be needed only for six months; he will not bind himself that he will not need more troops at a later time. He pointed out that the forces he is requesting are within the 525,000 ceiling to which he agreed. Parenthetically, he commented that he doesn't know how sacrosanct that figure is. In response to the questions posed in my message to him, attached hereto, he made the following comments:

a. He does not anticipate "defeat," but he desperately needs the troop elements requested in order to capitalize on opportunities available to him. The enemy has been repulsed in II, III and IV Corps areas, but I Corps must be reinforced. If requested troops are not made available, he would have to undertake an unacceptably risky course of drawing additional forces

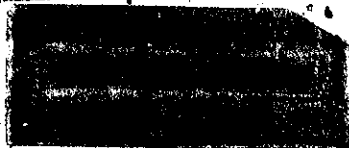
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Authority JCS 10-10-78
By ip/y, NARA, Date 2-12-92

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from elsewhere in South Vietnam.

b. On balance the ARVN has done a good job. He does not know the status of Regional Force and Popular Force troop elements. He believes it will be 1 April before the status of ARVN is known.

c. He can support logistically the forces he has requested; however, it is mandatory that he open and keep open Highways 1 and 9 and this will cost troops.

d. Additional forces will give him increased capability to regain the initiative and go on the offensive at an appropriate time.

3. As to paragraph 2 of my cable regarding strategy, General Westmoreland says they are good questions which he will respond to more fully in a message now being drafted. His brief responses to the thoughts expressed in paragraph 2 of my message are as follows:

a. His Priority One objective is to clear the cities.

b. He agrees with the expressed Priority Two of giving away no territory of value but he points out that sometimes he must fight in unfavorable terrain and weather in order not to give up important ground.

c. As to holding Khe Sanh, he has prepared on a close hold basis contingency plans to execute a tactical withdrawal if this becomes desirable and necessary. However, he believes strongly that retention of Khe Sanh will afford him in future opportunities to exploit the enemy's commitment of troops in and around Khe Sanh and deal him a severe and perhaps a knock out blow.

d. As to the Delta, he does have contingency plans to move forces from there as required. He points out that the battalions committed (US) in the Delta have stiffened the ARVN and have helped them to repulse the enemy with heavy losses. His Riverine Force is now being used in the vicinity of Can Tho with good effect.

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4. He reports that the damaged C-130 at Khe Sanh Airfield is undergoing repair and he hopes to get it out today. He intends to use C-123s and Caribou aircraft from now on to resupply Khe Sanh in order to conserve his C-130 assets. He is disseminating gravel in large quantities in and around Khe Sanh in those areas which he does not anticipate his forces will have to enter; there is evidence that the gravel is giving the enemy trouble. He is employing his B-52s with effect in bombing enemy forces and installations in the Khe Sanh area.

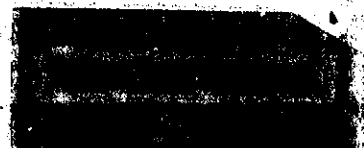
5. A senior VC political cadre was captured yesterday at Danang. This man had on him a long document, now being translated, which apparently represents the results of a high level conference of VC officials. The first quick examination of the document indicates that its contents reflect the view that the VC made a mistake in launching their Tet offensive at the time and in the manner they did. Specifically, the country was not ready for a mass uprising and US/ARVN military strength was seriously underestimated by VC/NVA forces.

6. While the decisions and requests made in his message of today are his, he has consulted closely with Ambassador Bunker, General Abrams and Mr. Komer who all agree as to the validity of his assessments and request for additional troop strength.

Earle G. Wheeler

EARLE G. WHEELER
Chairman
Joint Chiefs of Staff

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OK
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SECRET - CABLE - EYES ONLY - IMMEDIATE

FM GEN EARLE G. WHEELER, CJCS
TO GEN W. C. WESTMORELAND, COMUSMACV
INFO: ADM U.S.G. SHARP, CINCPAC
DELIVER SOONEST DURING WAKING HOURS

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Authority gosta 10-10-78
By sp/jh, NARA, Date 2-12-92

REF: MAC 01858

1. At a meeting at the White House this afternoon attended by Secy Rusk, Secy McNamara, Mr. Helms, General Max Taylor, Mr. Clark Clifford, Walt Rostow and myself there was ~~very~~ much discussion of the referenced message. The critical question addressed centered around paragraph 9 of the reference which leads off that you would welcome reinforcements at any time they can be made available and stated the purposes to which you would put these forces. Specifically, your message is interpreted here as expressing the following:

a. You could use additional U.S. troop units, but you are not expressing a firm demand for them; ^{in sum,} ~~you~~ you do not fear defeat if you are not reinforced;

b. You are concerned as to the possible status of the ARVN as a result of recent combat actions.

c. You are concerned about the reliability of your logistic system into northern I Corps Tactical Zone and believe that you must control and use Highway 1 through the Ai Van Pass.

d. Additional forces would give you increased capability to regain the initiative and go on the offensive at an appropriate time.

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2. ~~There was~~ Considerable discussion of the situation centered about the change in enemy strategy, its effect, and why the change was instituted. The question arose as to whether or not we too should not change our strategy. For example, one conferee stated that priority 1 should be to clear the cities; priority 2, give away no territory of value but avoid combat with the enemy in terrain and weather favoring him. You will perceive the thought in priority 2 that perhaps we are making a mistake by attempting to hold the Khe Sanh area and perhaps should concentrate our defenses further to the east. A further thought cited by the same conferee concerned the desirability of using U.S. troops now in the Delta as your reserve, leaving IV Corps operations to the ARVN.

3. I will telephone you at the usual time tomorrow. I would particularly appreciate having your views at that time ~~on~~ ^{regarding} the content of paragraph 1 of this message. Moreover, I would appreciate having your views by return message on all of the questions raised in this message.

4. FYI: I am considering a trip to visit with you sometime in the next few days in order to obtain at firsthand your thoughts as to the situation and corrective measures needed. If the trip comes off, I will quite probably stop in Hawaii en route to South Vietnam for about a half day to talk things over with you, Oley. Warm regards to you both.

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FM GEN WESTMORELAND COMUSMACV SAIGON

TO ADM SHARP CINCPAC HAWAII

GEN WHEELER CJCS WASH

ZEM

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Authority OSD Ltr 11/22/78

By up/188, NARA, Date 2-12-92

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SUBJECT: ASSESSMENT OF SITUATION AND REQUIREMENTS

1. SINCE LAST OCTOBER, THE ENEMY HAS LAUNCHED A MAJOR CAMPAIGN SIGNALING A CHANGE OF STRATEGY FROM ONE OF PROTRACTED WAR TO ONE OF QUICK MILITARY/POLITICAL VICTORY DURING THE AMERICAN ELECTION YEAR. HIS FIRST PHASE, DESIGNED TO SECURE THE BORDER AREAS, HAS FAILED. THE SECOND PHASE, LAUNCHED ON THE OCCASION OF TET AND DESIGNED TO INITIATE PUBLIC UPRISING, TO DISRUPT THE MACHINERY OF GOVERNMENT AND COMMAND AND CONTROL OF THE VIETNAMESE FORCES, AND TO ISOLATE THE CITIES, HAS ALSO FAILED. NEVERTHELESS, THE ENEMY'S THIRD PHASE, WHICH IS DESIGNED TO SEIZE QUANG TRI AND THUA THIEN PROVINCES HAS JUST BEGUN. THIS WILL BE A MAXIMUM EFFORT BY THE ENEMY, CAPITALIZING ON HIS SHORT LINES OF COMMUNICATION, THE POOR WEATHER PREVAILING IN THE AREA FOR THE NEXT TWO MONTHS, AND HIS ABILITY TO BRING ARTILLERY AND ROCKET FIRE TO BEAR ON INSTALLATIONS FROM POSITIONS IN THE DMZ AND NORTH AND FROM LAOS TO THE WEST. FURTHERMORE, HE CAN BRING ARMOR TO BEAR ON THE BATTLEFIELD. IT IS CLEAR THAT THE ENEMY HAS DECIDED HE CAN NOT "STRIKE OUT" IN THIS PHASE AS A MATTER OF FACE. WE CAN THEREFORE EXPECT HIM TO EXERT ON THE BATTLEFIELD THE MAXIMUM MILITARY POWER AVAILABLE

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TO HIM. IN ADDITION, WE MUST EXPECT HIM TO TRY TO REGAIN THE INITIATIVE IN ALL OTHER AREAS.

2. IF THE ENEMY HAS CHANGED HIS STRATEGY, WE MUST CHANGE OURS. ON THE ASSUMPTION THAT IT IS OUR NATIONAL POLICY TO PROHIBIT THE ENEMY FROM SEIZING AND PERMANENTLY OCCUPYING THE TWO NORTHERN PROVINCES, I INTEND TO HOLD THEM AT ALL COST. HOWEVER, TO DO SO I MUST REINFORCE FROM OTHER AREAS AND ACCEPT A MAJOR RISK, UNLESS I CAN GET REINFORCEMENTS, WHICH I DESPERATELY NEED.

3. TO BRING THE MAXIMUM MILITARY POWER TO BEAR ON THE ENEMY IN QUANG TRI AND THUA THIEN AND TO PREVENT THE GRADUAL EROSION OF THESE TWO PROVINCES, I MUST OPEN UP HIGHWAY 1 FROM DANANG AND HIGHWAY 9 TO KHE SANH. THESE TWO TASKS ARE NOT UNREASONABLE, PROVIDED THAT I CAN DIVERT THE TROOPS TO PROVIDE SECURITY AND COMMIT THE ENGINEERS TO THE TASK. I THEREFORE MUST MAKE A DOWN PAYMENT IN TROOPS IN ORDER TO PROVIDE THE LOGISTICS TO SUPPORT IN FULLY ADEQUATE FASHION TROOPS NOW DEPLOYED AND REINFORCEMENTS THAT WILL BE REQUIRED. FIRST, IT WILL REQUIRE A MARINE REGIMENT OR AN ARMY BRIGADE TO SECURE THE AI VAN PASS FROM QUANG TRI TO HUE/PHU BAI. ANOTHER REGIMENT OR BRIGADE WILL BE REQUIRED BETWEEN HUE AND QUANG TRI. FINALLY, A THIRD REGIMENT OR BRIGADE WILL BE REQUIRED TO SECURE HIGHWAY 9 TO THE KHE SANH AREA. I CANNOT AFFORD TO DIVERT TROOPS NOW DEPLOYED IN THAT AREA FOR THE PURPOSE AND AM THEREFORE FORCED TO DEPLOY THE 101ST ABN DIV FROM THE III CORPS; THIS IS NOW IN THE PROCESS AND WILL BE DONE AS FAST AS TRANSPORTATION CAN BE MADE AVAILABLE. EVEN THE COMMITMENT OF THE 101ST WILL

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PUT ME IN NO BETTER THAN A MARGINAL POSTURE TO COPE WITH THE SITUATION AT HAND.

4. THIS HAS BEEN A LIMITED WAR WITH LIMITED OBJECTIVES, FOUGHT WITH LIMITED MEANS AND PROGRAMMED FOR THE UTILIZATION OF LIMITED RESOURCES. THIS WAS A FEASIBLE PROPOSITION ON THE ASSUMPTION THAT THE ENEMY WAS TO FIGHT A PROTRACTED WAR. WE ARE NOW IN A NEW BALL GAME WHERE WE FACE A DETERMINED, HIGHLY DISCIPLINED ENEMY, FULLY MOBILIZED TO ACHIEVE A QUICK VICTORY. HE IS IN THE PROCESS OF THROWING IN ALL HIS "MILITARY CHIPS TO GO FOR BROKE." WE REALIZES AND I REALIZE THAT HIS GREATEST OPPORTUNITY TO DO THIS IS IN QUANG TRI-THUA THIEN. WE CANNOT PERMIT THIS. ON THE OTHER HAND, WE MUST SEIZE THE OPPORTUNITY TO CRUSH HIM. AT THE SAME TIME, WE CANNOT PERMIT HIM TO MAKE GAINS IN THE OTHER CORPS AREAS, AND I AM OBLIGATED TO MAINTAIN THE MINIMUM ESSENTIAL TROOPS IN THESE AREAS TO INSURE STABILITY OF THE SITUATION AND TO REGAIN THE INITIATIVE. EQUAL IN PRIORITY TO THE ENEMY IS THE SAIGON AREA AND A HIGH RISK IN THIS AREA IS UNACCEPTABLE. I NOW HAVE APPROXIMATELY 500,000 US TROOPS AND 60,981 FREE WORLD MILITARY ASSISTANCE TROOPS. FURTHER CONTRIBUTIONS FROM THE THAIS AND KOREANS ARE MONTHS AWAY. I HAVE BEEN PROMISED 525,000 TROOPS, WHICH ACCORDING TO PRESENT PROGRAMS WILL NOT MATERIALIZE UNTIL 1969. I NEED THESE 525,000 TROOPS NOW. IT SHOULD BE NOTED THAT THIS CEILING ASSUMED THE SUBSTANTIAL REPLACEMENT OF MILITARY BY CIVILIANS, WHICH NOW APPEARS IMPRACTICAL. I NEED REINFORCEMENTS IN TERMS OF COMBAT ELEMENTS. I THEREFORE URGE THAT THERE BE

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DEPLOYED IMMEDIATELY A MARINE REGIMENT PACKAGE AND A BRIGADE PACKAGE OF THE 82D ABN DIV AND THAT THE REMAINING ELEMENTS OF THOSE TWO DIVISIONS BE PREPARED TO FOLLOW AT A LATER TIME. TIME IS OF THE ESSENCE.

5. I MUST STRESS EQUALLY THAT WE FACE A SITUATION OF GREAT OPPORTUNITY AS WELL AS HEIGHTENED RISK. HOWEVER, TIME IS OF THE ESSENCE HERE, TOO. I DO NOT SEE HOW THE ENEMY CAN LONG SUSTAIN THE HEAVY LOSSES WHICH HIS NEW STRATEGY IS ENABLING US TO INFLICT ON HIM. THEREFORE, ADEQUATE REINFORCEMENTS SHOULD PERMIT ME NOT ONLY TO CONTAIN HIS I CORPS OFFENSIVE BUT ALSO TO CAPITALIZE ON HIS LOSSES BY SEIZING THE INITIATIVE IN OTHER AREAS. EXPLOITING THIS OPPORTUNITY COULD MATERIALLY SHORTEN THE WAR.

6. IF CINCPAC CONCURS, REQUEST THAT THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE AND COMMANDER IN CHIEF BE INFORMED OF MY POSITION.

7. I HAVE DISCUSSED THIS MESSAGE IN DETAIL WITH AMB BUNKER AND HE CONCURS.

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