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

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CM-2980-68
19 Feb 1968

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

SUBJ: TELEPHONE CONVERSATION WITH GENERAL WESTMORELAND

1. You will have received General Westmoreland's 15th report on the situation in the Khe Sanh/DMZ area. Attached hereto is an operations/intelligence summary of events of the past two days. I have also attached a copy of the trip report of General Bruce C. Clarke, U.S. Army (Retired) giving his impressions during his recent trip to South Vietnam. General Clarke was accompanied by Mr. Frank W. Mayborn of Temple, Texas whom I am sure you know.

2. Due to communications difficulties between Washington and Hawaii my telephone conversation with General Westmoreland was not possible until 0830 hours. He provided the following information:

a. Yesterday an OP-2E aircraft with a crew of 9 was shot down in the MUSCLE SHOALS area while laying sensors.

b. The ground control approach equipment was knocked out at Khe Sanh yesterday; there is a backup set available and it is being installed.

c. Light contact continues with the enemy in the vicinity of Dalat.

d. The stickiest situation at present is at Phan Thiet. The enemy force which penetrated the town, seized the jail and the hospital, still occupies about one-third of the town. It continues to hold the hospital area and occupied bunkers outside of town. Despite the fact the force has lost 103 men killed, the going to clear the town is tough and proceeding slowly.

e. There continue to be contacts with the enemy north of Saigon and south of Saigon. In a heavy contact south of Saigon Vietnamese Marine Corps units killed 144 enemy.

f. North of Tay Ninh City an enemy force apparently preparing rocket positions was discovered and attacked, resulting in 60 enemy KIA.

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Authority JCS Ltr 10-3-78
By SP-1, NARA

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g. Certain new units of the enemy have been identified near Song Be. These appear to be groups of replacement which have been formed into combat units to continue enemy pressure in the Song Be area.

h. The enemy has been driven out of Vinh Long. There was some damage to the Cathedral in the town and 58 enemy were killed.

i. The Riverine force had a contact with the enemy south of Can Tho. Results are not yet known.

3. He anticipates that there may be additional enemy activity in the Khe Sanh area tonight; however, this is not positive information.

4. The additional battalion of the First Cavalry Division which I reported yesterday as moving to the Quang Tri area began closing into Quang Tri today.

5. As a general observation, General Westmoreland stated that the enemy continues to hang in close to the cities. The enemy is apparently attempting to resupply his forces and bring up replacements and reinforcements.

Earle G. Wheeler

EARLE G. WHEELER
Chairman
Joint Chiefs of Staff

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General Impressions of:

General Bruce C. Clarke (USA-Retired)

Mr. Frank W. Mayborn, Publisher, Temple, Texas

COL James R. Hillard, Armor, Escort

On their trip to Vietnam, 1 - 16 February 1968

ITINERARY

Left Washington DC and Texas 1 Feb 68

Arrived in Honolulu 1 Feb 68

Left Honolulu 4 Feb, via Tokyo, Hong Kong, Bangkok, Saigon -

Arrived Saigon 7 Feb 68

Travelled in Vietnam 8 - 13 Feb

Returned home 14 - 16 Feb

Brief en route by:

General Beach - CINCUSARPAC

Admiral Sharp - CINCPAC

Major General McCown - JUSMAG, Thailand

Persons and units visited in Vietnam:

Ambassador Bunker

General Westmoreland

General Abrams

Staff Officers of USMACV

I Field Force

II Field Force

Senior Advisor IV ARVN Corps

Commander of Riverine Force

9th ROK Division

4th Inf Div

Dak To battlefield

9th Inf Div

US Army, Vietnam Headquarters

US Engineer Command

US Logistics Command

1st Aviation Brigade

1st Signal Brigade

Saigon City Command U.S.

25th Inf Div

21st ARVN Div

9th ARVN Div

Quang Tin Province Commander

Royal Thai Unit

Americal Division

In addition, we visited many subordinate units in the field.

We covered Vietnam from Bac Lieu in the Delta to Tam Ky near Danang and from the coast to the Cambodian border.

General Situation in Vietnam at this time.

The US buildup, started in 1965, has achieved a force of over 475,000 plus about 50,000 allied troops.

A huge logistics complex necessary to support this force has been constructed.

Bombing of the North has been in effect for some time with several pauses.

The "Prolonged Conflict" policy of NVN gave way last summer to a new policy under General Giap because the allied strategy was causing the NVN-VC continually to lose ground.

Phase I of Giap's New Strategy. Artillery attacks on Con Thien; attacks from Laos on Loc Ninh and Dak To on the Cambodian border. These attacks were beaten off.

Phase II of Giap's strategy. Purposes of TET offensive of early February against SVN cities:

1. Secure surprise.
2. Win psychological and political victory.
3. Cause ARVN units to defect.
4. Cause people to rise up to support VC.
5. To show up inability of US and SVN Government to protect the people.
6. To take over SVN control structure.
7. Disrupt flow of food to Saigon. The long range results of the VC attacks will not show many substantial gains but will show many losses. The VC lost 30,000 killed, several thousand arms captured as well as several thousand prisoners.

The people did not defect but feel a bitterness toward the VC for their acts at TET.

The ARVN Army, in general, acquitted itself well. We found no reports of defections.

The VC has lost resources and prestige. In several cases the VC Infrastructure surfaced and was destroyed.

The enemy units that carried out the TET offensive were not all VC. Some had as high as 70% NVN fillers.

Many of the prisoners captured were boys 12-14 years of age; some having been in the units only a few days.

There were even women in their ranks - some were captured.

These factors go to show the dwindling resources of the VC and how more and more this is becoming a NVN war.

Since the TET offensive there has been an opening up of the local people on information about the location of the VC. This is a result of the reduced fear of VC reprisals.

An example of the planning of the VC for the TET offensive was the systematic cratering of roads and destruction of bridges on routes leading from the Delta area and other food-producing areas to Saigon.

Phase III of Giap's Strategy.

Phases I and II having produced no material results, Giap is turning to Phase III apparently.

At the west end of the DMZ, blocking the invasion routes over the trails leading from Laos, lies the Marine major outpost of Khe Sanh. It is important to our holding the two Northern Provinces of SVN.

For some time Giap has been building up his NVN forces around Khe Sanh with a view to its capture with a resultant military and psychological victory. It is the key to his Phase III strategy.

The allies are aware of the threat and are reacting to it to be well prepared. They fully expect to defeat this Phase III also.

Advantages to the allies in VN.

Strategic air power

Close air support

Great fire power

Mobility

Naval support

Communications

Medical support

Logistics support

Strategic intelligence

Armor units

Mechanical support equipment

It is obvious that these advantages will play a great part in Phase III and should be decisive.

The expected attack is now several days delayed because of measures taken to disrupt the buildup. All echelons of the command effected are leaving nothing to chance to be ready. There will be no surprise.

What will NVN do if Phase III fails?

1. Start a preliminary peace offensive.
2. Offer to negotiate, or
3. Withdraw the NVN troops into Laos and Cambodia and into NVN and break off the war. It will be recalled that Ho Chi Minh has never admitted any NVN troops in SVN.

With this background we will now set forth very briefly our general impressions on many of the factors looked for and about which we asked questions:

Command and leadership. Practically all of the general officers have had experience in two wars before Vietnam. They are highly schooled, selected, dedicated and motivated. They believe strongly in what they are doing.

General Westmoreland has been in command four years. He, assisted by Generals Abrams, Momyer and other senior generals, make up a winning team.

As you progress down the echelons of command you find the same relative professional competence.

The company grade officers and the NCO corps are probably the best in our Army's history. The result is confidence

in the leadership all through the ranks.

Personnel.

Morale is high by any test. The righteousness of our cause in Vietnam is not questioned. Dedication at all levels is high. The one year tour is a strong morale factor. The medical service is the best we have ever had in war. Integration is believed in and practiced at all levels.

Because there are no front or rear areas there are no "front line" and "rear area" soldiers. All are of equal status and prestige. This is a favorable morale factor.

Replacements are reported to be well trained and to quickly fit into the teams.

Equipment for US Troops.

There appears to the visitor to be no material equipment shortages.

The M-16 rifle is reported to be the best in the world for the Vietnam environment. Its reported problems are or have been solved effectively.

Armor Units.

These appeared to be highly valuable and much used. The terrain is not near as difficult in many places as is pictured in photos and TV coverage.

The new foot gear is very effective and comfortable.

The helicopter is the great mobility producer of this war.

Artillery Support.

This is good, prompt, accurate and flexible.

Communications.

Never did a force in the field enjoy so extensive communications. Still there is a need to perfect the radio for use in the infantry squad and get it in the hands of troops.

Logistics.

The logistics systems appear to be effective, flexible, mobile and adequate.

Close air support.

This is prompt, accurate and effective. This accuracy combined with that of our artillery has not only given outstanding support to our troops but has reduced the inadvertent casualties on friendly troops and civilians.

Engineer support.

In an undeveloped country such as Vietnam there is great need for engineer support. This has been met in a big way.

Much of the engineer work will long endure to the benefit of Vietnam, heretofore a country with but one port and few good roads or clearings.

Intelligence.

Tactical intelligence in all units has gradually been perfected. In each tactical unit's area we found a clear and up-to-date knowledge of the enemy they were responsible for. This in spite of the fluid nature of the war.

Civic Action.

All units have programs in many fields in their areas such as medical assistance, shelter, refugee care, water supply, roads, schools, food, materials, etc.

The key to long range help of villages and hamlets is security that is dependable. It is necessary to destroy the fear of the VC coming in and destroying what has been done and harassing the villagers. With security and a modest scale of help in materials and services the country can progress very rapidly. But security must come first.

The terms "Pacification" and "Revolutionary Development" are not popularly understood and are not indicative of the two factors needed which are:

Security followed by

Development assistance

The Reserve call up should consider civil affairs units. They are needed to assist in the development of city and provincial governments.

The Vietnamese Armed Forces.

In the Army these fall into three categories.

Mainline units under the central government.

Regional Forces under the province chiefs.

Popular Forces under the local officials.

They are all important and must have training, mobility, weapons, equipment, morale, confidence, leadership, support to carry out adequately their missions.

Excellence in a new military unit comes slowly.

The first requirement is good leadership at all levels to include the NCO's. This requires time, schooling and experience. This leadership is coming in the VN Army but slowly.

During the TET offensive there were many examples of good leadership.

The experiences of the TET offensive have added to their confidence, morale, esprit and experience. They will perform even better next time.

Fifteen years ago the Korean Army was in the same stage of development. Today, two very effective Korean divisions are doing well in Vietnam. They are equipped equally to US units, well-trained, with high morale.

But the Vietnamese units are still on a very austere priority for equipment to include weapons. This affects their

morale, effectiveness and their ability to supply the first essential ingredient of success - security. This should be corrected as a matter of urgency. Troops know and feel it when they are poorly equipped.

CONCLUSIONS:

These conclusions are drawn from our discussions and observations:

1. Phases I and II of Giap's strategy have failed.
2. The TET offensive will be a long-range set-back for the VC.
3. The future of Vietnam is based upon security and development assistance especially on the District level. This security which must come first is dependent upon the ability of the Vietnamese Army units to perform their missions. This requires their adequate equipping and rapid development.
4. Long range thought on the military, political and diplomatic levels should be given to what to do next after the pending battle of Khe Sanh. Any victory should be promptly exploited.
5. The bombing should be continued until its halting will not lower the threshold of infiltration of ammunition, men and supplies into SVN. Unless this is done, the price will be greatly increased allied casualties.
6. The enclave theory has few supporters. It would not provide security in outlying hamlets or districts. It would present

a passive posture to the enemy. It would give up the initiative to him also. Our posture along the Laos and upper Cambodian borders and along the DMZ is one of defending an enclave. Giap's strategy takes advantage of this at Khe Sanh to our disadvantage.

7. All commanders we interviewed were aware of the necessity of avoiding inadvertent casualties among the civilian population. Such casualties are relatively small unless brought about by VC action jeopardizing our security.

8. And finally, our troops in Vietnam represent the best of dedicated American manhood. They deserve our whole-hearted support. To add to their casualties by statements or actions is both immoral and unjustified by any US citizen. They have unity and morale on a high order. If the same were true at home the outcome of their efforts would not be in any doubt and the war might soon be over. --