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

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27 February 1968

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MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

Subject: Military Situation and Requirements in South Vietnam

1. I spent the better part of three days conferring with General Westmoreland, General Abrams, General Momyer and the Senior American Commanders in each of the four Corps areas. With Ambassador Bunker and General Westmoreland, I called on President Thieu and Vice President Ky and, with General Westmoreland, saw General Vien.
2. I have prepared a more detailed report which you may wish to see later, but the major points are outlined in this memorandum.
3. There is no doubt that the enemy launched a major powerful nation-wide assault against the Government of South Vietnam and its Armed Forces. This offensive has by no means run its course. In fact, we must accept the possibility that he has already deployed additional elements of his home army without our having detected such a move. We must be prepared to encounter enemy use of longer range missiles or rockets (Frog) and limited use of enemy tactical air. All commanders on the scene agree that his initial attack nearly succeeded in a dozen places and the margin of victory -- in some places survival -- was very very small indeed. Whether he intends to expend himself fully at the current level of intensity or hold out enough to fight next year is not known. However, the scope and severity of his attacks and the extent of his reinforcement are presenting us with serious and immediate problems.

Declassified by  
OJCS, 10 Jul 86

OASD(PA) DECISR 86-TS-71

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Sec-MDR-1/16

4. The South Vietnamese Armed Forces performed remarkably well in most places, most elements were not hurt too seriously, and are on the road to recovering their fighting strength, but they are not yet out of the woods. On 20 February RVNAF forces had 97 effective and 58 ineffective battalions. The ineffective battalions seemed to be recovering fairly rapidly. The Regional and Popular Force situation is not yet clear. There is some question as to whether the South Vietnamese Armed Forces have the stamina to withstand the pressure of a prolonged enemy offensive. General Westmoreland has already been forced to move to their assistance in a number of important areas. Commanders are unanimous in the view that the VC would have achieved a number of significant local successes at the outset, except for timely reinforcement by US forces. At the moment there are ten US battalions operating in the outskirts of Saigon against a number of enemy regiments which have encircled the city. US forces are carrying the brunt of the action at Hue and are preparing for large scale actions in the northern two provinces, in the Highlands, and around Saigon. With respect to northern I Corps the major engagements may be at Hue and Quang Tri instead of Khe Sanh.

5. The enemy has undoubtedly been hurt, but he seems determined to pursue his offensive -- apparently he has the capability to do so. There has been a substantial withdrawal of ARVN forces from the countryside in order to protect the cities and towns. Therefore, unless ARVN forces reenter the countryside quickly it may go by default. In my meetings with President Thieu, Vice President Ky and General Vien, I emphasized the need for ARVN units to move out of the cities and towns into the countryside and operate against the enemy infesting the environs. All three agreed, but they commented upon the serious effect on the urban population of a recurrence of the TET operations. General Westmoreland is working with General Vien to implement a program whereby urban security would be turned over in a major way to Police Forces supported by small mobile military forces held in reserve to reinforce the police when they encounter enemy forces with which they can not cope. Most commanders believe that ARVN will need, or -- just as importantly -- think it needs, assistance from US forces for this purpose. Thus, at the very time General Westmoreland is redeploying and otherwise preparing to meet major thrusts by large NVA forces, he is forced to pick up part

of the tab from ARVN. This is especially true in and around Hue, Saigon and the II and IV Corps.

6. It is the consensus of responsible commanders that 1968 will be the pivotal year. The war may go on beyond 1968 but it is unlikely that the situation will return to the pre-TET condition. The forces committed and the tactics involved are such that the advantage will probably swing one way or the other, during the current year.

7. US forces are in good combat shape. Air support has not been significantly degraded. Increased requirements for rapid reaction by US forces has placed a premium on helicopter availability in the face of increasing battlefield losses. In-country airlift is increasingly critical. Logistical support is marginal in the northern I Corps but will improve with the opening of Hwy 1 and with temporary facilities now being built for over-the-shore supply. Equipment loss rates are up and we must review the adequacy of replacements and spare parts programs.

8. In many areas the pacification program has been brought to a halt. The VC are prowling the countryside, and it is now a question of which side moves fastest to gain control. The outcome is not at all clear. I visualize much heavy fighting ahead. Casualties will probably remain high. Equipment losses will continue at a high level. ARVN may prove to be a bit shaky under sustained pressure. The government will have enormous problems with refugees, civilian casualties, morale and recovery.

9. If the enemy synchronizes his expected major attacks with increased pressure throughout the country, General Westmoreland's margin will be paper thin. He does not have a theatre reserve. We can expect some cliff-hangers, and with bad luck on weather or some local RVNAF failures he may suffer some reverses. For these reasons he is asking for additional forces as soon as possible during this calendar year.

10. General Westmoreland wants, as a matter of urgency, a mechanized brigade consisting of one tank battalion and one mechanized battalion and one infantry battalion from the 5th Mechanized Division. He also wants an armored cavalry regiment and the

remainder of the 5th Marine Division/Wing, and the acceleration of the deployment of certain supporting units now programmed for deployment under Program 5.

11. These immediately required forces, which he hopes to receive before the first of May, will permit him to deploy additional armored elements to reinforce along the DMZ and will include a capability to cope with a potential enemy armored threat. He hopes that this will permit him to disengage at least some elements of the 1st Air Cavalry Division or the 101st Airborne Division for the beginnings of a theatre reserve. The additional requirement, which he considers necessary as soon as possible, but not later than 1 September 1968, includes the ROK Light Div, the remainder of the 5th Mechanized Division and associated elements. The armored elements of this force could be deployed in a mobile defense of the DMZ thus releasing the remainder of the airborne infantry or air cavalry forces for employment elsewhere as a substantial theatre reserve. This would also permit the repatriation of the brigade of the 82d Airborne Div.

12. As a matter of prudence, particularly in light of the protracted NVA buildup, General Westmoreland states a requirement during the calendar year for an additional infantry division to anticipate possible deterioration of some ARVN units, and to provide a reasonably available two-division theatre reserve at all times of the year.

13. It is my judgment that General Westmoreland requires a theatre reserve of about two divisions. The deployment of the 5th Mechanized Division, the armored cavalry regiment, and additional Marines would permit him to shake loose either the air cavalry or the airborne division as a theatre reserve. Additionally, at the onset of the good weather season in the DMZ area (from May to November), he could probably extract the other Army division to constitute an adequate reserve. If Hanoi deploys additional elements of the home army, this reserve might also be committed and additional force requirements would be generated.

14. The rough estimate of added strength required for the three force increments is:

|                                         | <u>Army</u>   | <u>Navy</u> | <u>USMC</u>  | <u>USAF</u>  | <u>TOTAL</u>  |
|-----------------------------------------|---------------|-------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|
| a. Immediate Increment,<br>Priority One | 54,000        | 8,060       | 37,132       | 8,791        | 107,983       |
| b. Immediate Increment,<br>Priority Two | 31,600        | 4,446       | --           | 5,750        | 41,796        |
| c. Follow-on Increment                  | <u>46,700</u> | <u>138</u>  | <u>2,004</u> | <u>6,558</u> | <u>55,400</u> |
| TOTAL                                   | 132,300       | 12,644      | 39,136       | 21,099       | 205,179       |

15. The spread sheet attached sets forth the major units included in the above strength figures.



EARLE G. WHEELER  
Chairman  
Joint Chiefs of Staff

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DECLASSIFIED

Authority

JCS-10-4-78

By

DCH NARS Date 4-7-82

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Sec Def Cont Nr. R-

2632

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 EARLE G. WHEELER  
 Chairman  
 Joint Chiefs of Staff

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|                       | CLOSURE<br>DATE                                  | ARMY<br>FORCES                                                                                                                           | USMC<br>FORCES                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | AIR<br>FORCES                                                                                                      | NAVY<br>FORCES                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| STATE<br>MENT<br>TY 1 | BY 1 MAY 68                                      | 1 BDE, 5TH MECH DIV<br>1 ARMD CAV REGT<br>3 ARTY BNS<br>4 ENGR BNS<br>4 MILITARY POLICE BNS<br>2 HOSPITALS<br>OTHER SUPPORTING<br>FORCES | 5TH MARINE DIV (-)<br>2 REGIMENTAL LAND-<br>ING TEAMS* & SUP-<br>PORTING ELEMENTS<br>FORCE TROOPS (-)<br>TANK, ARTY, ENGR,<br>COMMUNICATIONS, &<br>OTHER SUPPORTING<br>ELEMENTS<br>MARINE AIR WING(-)<br>4 TAC FTR SQDNS<br>3 HELICOPTER SQDNS | 4 TAC FTR SQDNS<br>BASE SECURITY<br>INCREASED AIRLIFT<br>INCREASED BASE SUP-<br>PORT FOR ADDITION-<br>AL FORCES    | MOBILE RIVERINE<br>FORCES(MEKONG DELTA)<br>3 BARRACKS LIGHTERS<br>3 TUGS<br>LANDING CRAFT<br>INCREASED SUPPORT<br>FOR ICTZ<br>1 HOSPITAL<br>1 CONSTRUCTION BN<br>LANDING CRAFT<br>NAVY PERSONNEL WITH<br>MARINES |
| STATE<br>MENT<br>TY 2 | AS SOON AS POSSIBLE,<br>BUT PRIOR TO 1 SEP<br>68 | 5TH MECH DIV (-)<br>2 BDES<br>1 AIR CAV SQDN<br>2 ARTY BNS<br>3 ENGR BNS<br>3 HOSPITALS<br>2 MILITARY POLICE BNS<br>HELICOPTER COMPANIES | NONE                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | 4 TAC FTR SQDNS<br>1 AIR DEFENSE SQDN<br>AIRCRAFT TO SUPPORT<br>NAVY GAME WARDEN<br>OPERATIONS<br>INCREASE AIRLIFT | GAME WARDEN<br>(INTERDICTION OF<br>INLAND WATERWAYS)<br>LANDING CRAFT<br>3 TUGS<br>PATROL BOATS<br>INCREASED SUPPORT<br>FOR ICTZ<br>CONSTRUCTION<br>PERSONNEL                                                    |
| W-ON<br>MENT          | BY DEC 68                                        | INF DIV<br>3 AIR CAV SQDNS<br>2 ARTY BNS<br>2 ENGR BNS<br>2 HOSPITALS<br>HELICOPTER COMPANIES                                            | 12 COMBINED ACTION<br>COMPANIES<br>138 COMBINED ACTION<br>PLATOONS                                                                                                                                                                             | 3 TAC FTR SQDNS<br>INCREASED AIRLIFT                                                                               | NAVAL PATROL PLANE<br>SQUADRON<br>CONSTRUCTION PERSON-<br>NEL<br>NAVY PERSONNEL WITH<br>MARINE COMBINED<br>ACTION UNITS                                                                                          |

ATTACHMENT

RECOMMENDED DEPLOYMENTS - MAJOR UNITS~~TOP SECRET~~\* Includes 27th Marines  
Now Deployed

Soc Def Cont Nr. X-2632