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#73 notes	Notes from 2/28/68 - 8:35 a.m. Gen. Wheeler's trip to Vietnam discussion with Foreign Policy Advisors [Sanitized NLJ 83-13] Secret 12 pp. <i>San 12/02</i> <i>open RAC 129-001-3-1</i>	2/28/68	A
#73a memo	Earle G. Wheeler to the President Top Secret 6 pp. <i>open 6/27/93</i>	2/27/68	A
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FILE LOCATION

Tom Johnson's Notes of Meetings, Box 2

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FEBRUARY 28, 1968 - 8:35 a.m.

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MEETING WITH FOREIGN POLICY ADVISORS
TO DISCUSS GENERAL WHEELER'S TRIP
TO VIETNAM

Vice President	Under Secretary Nitze
Secretary Rusk	Director Helms
Secretary McNamara	Walt Rostow
Clark Clifford	George Christian
General Taylor	Tom Johnson

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NOTES OF THE PRESIDENT'S MEETING
TO DISCUSS GENERAL WHEELER'S TRIP
TO VIETNAM

February 28, 1968
In the Mansion

Attending the meeting:

- The President
- The Vice President
- Secretary Rusk
- Secretary McNamara
- Clark Clifford
- General Taylor
- Under Secretary Paul Nitze
- CIA Director Helms
- Walt Rostow
- George Christian
- Tom Johnson

General Wheeler: This is a summary report. By later today the full report should be ready.

The ARVN were not as seriously hurt as some reports indicated. The ARVN were not fragmented although units fighting in Hue in some cases are down to 25% strength.

The ARVN are held up in the cities and fear a recurrence of attacks similar to the ones on the cities during TET. They seem to be looking back over their shoulders.

General Taylor: What about communications into the hinterlands?

General Wheeler: The communications are there, particularly to the ~~district~~ towns. What happened in the areas outside the towns is the difficult thing. There is a lack of knowledge about some outposts.

Secretary Rusk: What's the mood of General Westmoreland and Ambassador Bunker?

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Authority NLT RAC 047-002-231
By John NARA, Date 10/22/02
11-8-16

Tom Johnson

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General Wheeler: Both are concerned. Westmoreland is concerned about the military situation. Bunker is pushing the government to get on with the job.

The President: Buzz, we are very thankful that you are back and appreciative of what you are doing.

I want Dick Helms to give us a summary of the situation as he sees it today.

Director Helms: It is difficult to give a summary of the situation since we are in the middle of the battle. The Communist are in high gear. This military activity may continue 3 to 4 months. Their objective is to wreck the Government of South Vietnam and its military structure. If, in the process, they can hit the U. S. units, that is okay. But their principal objective is against the ARVN.

The allies are on the defensive. The enemy does have the initiative. The enemy still has 50% of its main forces units in tact and they are now in a position to get manpower additions from the countryside.

The ARVN fought well but they have had a hard time. The net of this is that the ARVN is in worse shape today than before TET. I am concerned about defections since the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese have treated the people in the countryside rather decently. We may have to confront the possibility of desertion.

The Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese may ruin themselves if they go "flat out." I doubt that the Government of South Vietnam will collapse. It looks like there will continue to be more fighting and stand-off. I don't think it will be a decisive period for or against either side. The longer this thing is drawn out, the less likely I think negotiations are.

General Wheeler: I talked to General Westmoreland and all of the senior U.S. commanders. I also talked with Ambassador Bunker, President Thieu and Vice President Ky. There were a number of factors which surprised me. I certainly learned things I did not know before:

-- The TET attack was very powerful and nationwide.

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-- The enemy's prime objective was against the ARVN and the Government of Vietnam.

-- The enemy also wanted to destroy our logistic base and our command and control system. They were also after our air power.

-- The enemy planned on a major uprising and many defections. Our press had led the North Vietnamese to think the ARVN army was a pushover. That proved to be untrue.

The enemy has laid land lines down the Laotian panhandle. This will permit them to operate on radio silence and give their orders through land lines. This will make it much more difficult to monitor their intelligence.

-- The margin of victory was very thin in a number of battles.

-- What the future intensity of the conflict will be is an unknown.

-- We do know that more TET-type attacks are planned.

-- The enemy is still hanging in around the cities. They are still trying to infiltrate into Saigon.

-- The ARVN performed well. There were no defections. There has been some underpar performance due to poor leadership.

-- The RF and the PF carried the brunt of the fighting. Many elements of the ARVN were shot down.

-- I think it will take a minimum of 3 to 4 months before the ARVN returns to its previous strength. There are 58 ineffective battalions and 90 effective battalions as of the time I left. The RF and PF situation is not entirely clear.

-- The regular troops did take more casualties than the RF and PF forces.

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-- We believe about 40,000 enemy were killed. We cannot count the number wounded and missing.

-- On the Vietnamese side, there were approximately 12,000 KIA's and wounded.

The President: What you are saying is that the ARVN has been seriously hurt?

General Wheeler: Out of 140-150 battalions, 58 are ineffective due to losses of one type or another.

General Taylor: Are all back from TET?

General Wheeler: A number are back but we still do not know.

Paul Nitze: When ARVN units fall below 60% of full strength, they then call them ineffective. This suggests that a lot of men disappeared who are neither missing, or wounded, or killed in action.

General Wheeler: I have here a paper which was written on 31 January by the Military Affairs Committee and the Current Affairs Committee of the Liberation Army. We believe this document to be authentic.

In it the Viet Congs say their principal objectives were: a general offensive to destroy the ARVN, an effort to neutralize military and political support and to generate a general uprising.

They failed to get an uprising. There was no ARVN desertions. They did not capture the military targets they set out to capture. In many cases their attacks were ill-timed and ill-coordinated.

The document continues to say that they have problems with morale, with personnel, and need to continue the general offensive. They recommend pressing on with actions. They want to concentrate on our forces and take the "must win" areas like Saigon and Hue.

They told the units to avoid attacks on U.S. forces because of the heavy casualties that would result. They postponed their "victory day" 3 to 4 months. They told their forces to continue to attack their bases and harbors and to destroy the Vietnamese units and do

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everything they could to cause defections.

There is a major problem with the ARVN withdrawing to the cities and towns. They are worried about the security in the urban areas. I pointed this out to Thieu and Ky and told them that they are letting the countryside go by default.

Thieu and Ky recognized the danger in this and both of them said "we are faced with a dilemma." They said that they cannot afford to have another TET offensive in Saigon and in other towns.

The government is most worried about maintaining the support of the people.

There are these other observations:

- Pacification is at a halt.
 - The Viet Cong cannot roam at will in the countryside.
 - The worse situation on pacification is in I Corps north. The next worse is in I Corps south. The best pacification now is in II Corps.
 - None of the pacification programs is satisfactory to us. Bob Komer said the situation was not satisfactory anywhere.
 - As to our own forces, they are in good shape. The Air Force was not significantly degraded by the attacks. There has been an increase in helicopter losses, but there are more helicopters in Vietnam today than there were before TET.
- The equipment loss rate is up in all categories.
- Westmoreland is working to open Highway 1 in I Corps.

The President: Did we ever do anything about getting civilian contractors into these areas to build some of these bridges and other projects?

Secretary McNamara: We are going to increase the work being done by these contractors.

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General Wheeler: I asked about this. General Westmoreland said they can employ productively about 25,000 civilians.

The President: Use them to the maximum. This might save us from sending more troops from here.

General Wheeler: The construction engineers told me they have plenty of activities to keep the contractors busy.

The President: Be sure it is done.

General Wheeler: 1968 will be a critical year in the war. There is heavy fighting ahead. The losses will be high in men. The losses will be high in equipment.

The question is can the ARVN withstand another wave of attacks. The government has many problems, among them are the refugees, many civilian casualties and the continuing problem of morale.

The military situation is this: General Westmoreland must have a sufficient force in I Corps to hold securely those two northern provinces.

The enemy still has several courses of action open. They could attack Khesanh. They could leave a holding ^{force} ~~for us~~ around Khesanh and move south to attack Quang Tri and Hue. They could attack Danang. He does have the tactical flexibility. We know he is building a road in northern provinces to use for tanks and artillery. In short, General Westmoreland has no theater reserves. He has been stripped of his reserves.

He needs reserve forces for three reasons:

1. To repulse any enemy invasion.
2. To destroy the enemy forces and their bases.
3. To exploit enemy defeats.

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It is my judgment, and the judgment of General Westmoreland, that we must move into the Delta to catalyze the ARVN into action. The margin of victory was very thin in many of the battles over the TET. The margin between defeat and victory in many areas was surprisingly narrow. In the Delta three battalions of U.S. troops were sent to help the ARVN. If it had not been for these battalions, several key province towns could have been overrun.

The second surprise I had was that we came very close to losing Tan Son Nhut Air Base. It was touch and go there. This attack was blocked by battalions coming in and hitting the enemy from the rear. It was close. Around Danang, we had another close call. We had to put people down by chopper and then move them to catch the enemy second North Vietnam Division. It was close there too.

In my opinion, and in the opinion of General Westmoreland, he needs a theater reserve of two divisions.

General Westmoreland said he was thankful for the troops which had been sent. He said they had a good affect on the ARVN and on the people.

The President: Are all of them there now?

General Wheeler: All are due there today.

The President: How long will it be before they are ready?

General Wheeler: The 82nd should be ready now. The Marine units should be ready in a few days.

Westmoreland handled this bad situation well because of three things:

1. Mobility
2. Fire power
3. Flexibility in command.

As you can see from the attached table (see attachment) General Westmoreland has asked for three packages.

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By 1 May he wants a brigade of the 5th mechanized division; 1 armed cavalry regiment; 3 artillery battalions; 4 engineer battalions; other elements of the 5th Marine division; a Marine air wing and other units.

General Westmoreland wants more armor for where there is a threat the armored cavalry regiment is good for opening and securing roads.

If the President approves this, we propose a Four Structured Planning Meeting at Honolulu with representatives of the Joint Chiefs, General Westmoreland and the service secretaries to go over these requests and get the exact details ironed out.

This total request comes to 205,000 men.

The President: What are the alternatives?

General Wheeler: The only alternative to this, in our judgment, is a decision to be prepared to give up areas in lieu of more troops. Without the reserve, we should be prepared to give up the 2 northern provinces of South Vietnam. This, of course, would be a political hazard. It also would give the North Vietnamese a strong position for negotiating. It would, I believe, cause the collapse of the ARVN.

The President: What about those 65,000 troops the ARVN was supposed to provide?

General Wheeler: You will get them. They have begun steps to draft 18 and 19 year olds. They are recalling men to active duty who haven't served 5 years. President Thieu assured me we would get more than 65,000 if they could be absorbed and supported by the U. S. Government.

General Westmoreland thinks they can go above 65,000 this year. General Westmoreland wants them to concentrate on mobilizing their army, since the ARVN are frequently outgunned by the enemy. This is one reason why they are reluctant in some cases to fight.

The President: How is the recruitment of enemy coming?

General Wheeler: This is a matter of conjecture. We do know that they have brought their forces up by at least 3,000 men.

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Prior to TET they had approximately 225,000 troops of all types. By infiltration, recruitment and other steps, they were able to get this number up to 240,000 by the time of TET. We estimate they lost 40,000 killed; 5,000 disabled; and 3,000 prisoners of war who are military types. This totals about 48,000 enemy out of action. We now estimate that they have approximately 200,000 effective fighting units.

(At 9:35 the meeting moved to the Sitting Room).

General Wheeler: There were several North Vietnamese divisions which were relatively untouched including the 9th and the 5th. On the border, the first NVA division was relatively untouched. They back-stopped main force VC units. I think the two divisions around Khesanh have taken a good shellacking.

Director Helms: I worry about those figures on casualties and enemy strength being used. I am not sure how accurate they are.

General Wheeler: They are the best we have.

Secretary Rusk: What is General Westmoreland's strategy? What are his priorities? Is he tied to the towns?

General Wheeler: He feels he must have sufficient forces to hold.

General Taylor: Can he do it with these reserves (referring to the 200,000 requested.)

General Wheeler: Yes, I believe so unless the enemy ups the ante.

The President: Are we adequately prepared for Khesanh?

General Wheeler: Yes, sir.

The President: Do you think that it will be there (Khesanh) or elsewhere?

General Wheeler: We do not know. We know that we have about 5900 men at Khesanh with a Vietnamese ranger battalion. These units are heavily supported by air and artillery. We are pouring in air.

The price the enemy would have to pay would be a very high one if they were to try to take Khesanh. General Westmoreland does not believe they can take it.

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We have been bombing the enemy very heavily outside of Khesanh. They are being pushed severely. Just this week we hit an ammo dump and set off 4 1/2 hours of secondary explosions.

Westmoreland thinks the enemy can attack Khesanh or move south toward Hue and Quang Tri.

The President: How far is that?

General Wheeler: About 60 miles. The enemy could leave a holding force in the area.

The President: As I understand it, they have 40,000 to 50,000 men in a 40 mile area. We have 5000 men in Khesanh. We would bring in by plane or by road the necessary reinforcements if this position were attacked. Is it possible that the enemy has moved in more troops?

General Wheeler: Yes, Sir, it is possible that he could have moved in more troops. We ran into 3 tanks and we know that the enemy has a brigade of paratroopers. While we are on that we need CIA to give us some good photo reconnaissance of downtown Hanoi and the production centers. In addition, one prisoner of war said he saw 20 ^{tracked} ~~tract~~ vehicles with what appeared to be frog missiles on them. In short, the enemy could show up with more forces in the south than they have shown before.

The President: What about our taking the initiative ourselves? Is there anything we can do other than just sitting and waiting for them to attack?

General Wheeler: As far as new bombing efforts there is nothing new in the cards. We could plan an amphibious operation in the north, but we do not have the capacity to do it at this time.

Secretary Rusk: I think the President is talking about new initiatives in I Corps moving our units to attack rather than being on the defensive.

General Wheeler: Well, the 1st Cavalry Division is engaged in offensive actions against the enemy.

The President: It seems to me for months we have been waiting for them to move. They may be recouping and replacing their losses during this time. Does he plan any surprise moves of his own?

General Wheeler: He plans to move along the road and clear it. In addition, he is sending out patrols on foot to locate the enemy and

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get prisoners and move against them when possible.

The President: So he really has not initiative of his own other than to interrupt their road building and to patrol.

General Wheeler: No, except the 1st Division is engaged against the enemy at Hue.

The President: We may get some dazzling and shocking surprises. Perhaps we have overbuilt Khesanh. It looks like the enemy can pick and choose his own time and place. Does Westmoreland have any plans to attack them? I am not questioning his strategy. I am just trying to find out what the situation really is. As I understand it, he is prepared to move with other forces to attack the enemy if they attack Khesanh. Also he is prepared to move against anything coming down into the south. If they move across the DMZ, he will counter-attack.

How many men are programmed for him?

General Wheeler: 517,000 in the next 90 days. These are part of the Program 5 package.

The President: What do you have available to send to him in the next 60 days?

General Wheeler: We have not had a chance to go over this thoroughly.

Secretary McNamara: General Westmoreland has asked for 105,000 additional men by May 1. He has asked us to do it in 60 days, but I don't think we can do it in less than 90 to 120 days.

The President: Where will these troops come from?

Secretary McNamara: They will come in two increments resulting from a call up in reserve forces. There would be two call ups in the Army, the first for 90,000 and the second for 70,000. There would be about 50 to 60 thousand marines called and about 20,000 Navy and Air Force. This would total about 250,000 in reserve call up. In addition, we would need to extend tours up to 6 months and increase the draft call in May.

The President: Then we would call up the reserves and extend enlistments up to 6 months.

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Secretary McNamara: Yes, we would ask for an extension of enlistments for 6 months for a period of authority extending for 8 months from now. No single man would stay in longer than 6 months, but the need for this authority may extend for the next 8 months.

As I see this total program, it would add 2 1/2 billion dollars to the 1968 budget. It would increase the 1969 budget by \$10 billion. It would increase the 1970 budget by about \$15 billion.

Of course, we would have to expand production of helicopters, ordnance, air power, and ground support equipment.

The President: How is the M-16 production coming? Colt is working 3 shifts now on a 5 day a week basis. There will be a second source coming in. We get production of about 29,000 rifles now and expect this to be up to 40,000 by the end of the year. A total of 683,000 M-16's have been produced so far.

In addition, we would open several new camps. There would be a need to open Camp Chaffee in Arkansas and Pickett Hill in Virginia. In addition, we would open Camp Roberts in California and Indiantown Gap in Pennsylvania.

The President: Could you handle all of the equipment and supplies for all of these bases?

Secretary McNamara: Yes, the Marine units could be ready in 8 weeks. The Army units could be ready in 12 to 16 weeks. We would immediately call 57,000 Marines and 90,000 Army. At the time of the announcement we would also say that this would be followed by an additional 70,000.

The President: What type of men are these that would be called?

Secretary McNamara: They are of three types:

1. World War II and Korean Veterans
2. Men who have already fulfilled two years of active service and are now in the active reserves.
3. Men who have 6 months training and have had less active service.

There will be lots of gripping but I don't think the problem will be serious.

The President: What problems are there now?

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

73a
27 February 1968

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.

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Authority JCS ltr 10/4/78

By SP/isp, NARA, Date 8/27/93

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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

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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

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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:

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	<u>Army</u>	<u>Navy</u>	<u>USMC</u>	<u>USAF</u>	<u>TOTAL</u>
a. Immediate Increment, Priority One	54,000	8,060	37,132	8,791	107,983
b. Immediate Increment, 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.

/s/
EARLE G. WHEELER
Chairman
Joint Chiefs of Staff

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

ATTACHMENT

RECOMMENDED DEPLOYMENTS - MAJOR UNITS

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* Includes 27th Marines
Now Deployed

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NOTES OF THE PRESIDENT'S MEETING
TO DISCUSS GENERAL WHEELER'S TRIP
TO VIETNAM

February 28, 1968
In the Mansion

Attending the meeting:

The President
The Vice President
Secretary Rusk
Secretary McNamara
Clark Clifford
General Taylor
Under Secretary Paul Nitze
CIA Director Helms
Walt Rostow
George Christian
Tom Johnson

General Wheeler: This is a summary report. By later today the full report should be ready.

The ARVN were not as seriously hurt as some reports indicated. The ARVN were not fragmented although units fighting in Hue in some cases are down to 25% strength.

The ARVN are held up in the cities and fear a recurrence of attacks similar to the ones on the cities during TET. They seem to be looking back over their shoulders.

General Taylor: What about communications into the hinterlands?

General Wheeler: The communications are there, particularly to the distant towns. What happened in the areas outside the towns is the difficult thing. There is a lack of knowledge about some outposts.

Secretary Rusk: What's the mood of General Westmoreland and Ambassador Bunker?

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General Wheeler: Both are concerned. Westmoreland is concerned about the military situation. Bunker is pushing the government to get on with the job.

The President: Buzz, we are very thankful that you are back and appreciative of what you are doing.

I want Dick Helms to give us a summary of the situation as he sees it today.

Director Helms: It is difficult to give a summary of the situation since we are in the middle of the battle. The Communist are in high gear. This military activity may continue 3 to 4 months. Their objective is to wreck the Government of South Vietnam and its military structure. If, in the process, they can hit the U. S. units, that is okay. But their principal objective is against the ARVN.

The allies are on the defensive. The enemy does have the initiative. The enemy still has 50% of its main forces units in tact and they are now in a position to get manpower additions from the countryside.

The ARVN fought well but they have had a hard time. The net of this is that the ARVN is in worse shape today than before TET. I am concerned about defections since the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese have treated the people in the countryside rather decently. We may have to confront the possibility of desertion.

The Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese may ruin themselves if they go "flat out." I doubt that the Government of South Vietnam will collapse. It looks like there will continue to be more fighting and stand-off. I don't think it will be a decisive period for or against either side. The longer this thing is drawn out, the less likely I think negotiations are.

General Wheeler: I talked to General Westmoreland and all of the senior U.S. commanders. I also talked with Ambassador Bunker, President Thieu and Vice President Ky. There were a number of factors which surprised me. I certainly learned things I did not know before:

-- The TET attack was very powerful and nationwide.

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-- The enemy's prime objective was against the ARVN and the Government of Vietnam.

-- The enemy also wanted to destroy our logistic base and our command and control system. They were also after our air power.

-- The enemy planned on a major uprising and many defections. Our press had led the North Vietnamese to think the ARVN army was a pushover. That proved to be untrue.

The enemy has laid land lines down the Laotian panhandle. This will permit them to operate on radio silence and give their orders through land lines. This will make it much more difficult to monitor their intelligence.

-- The margin of victory was very thin in a number of battles.

-- What the future intensity of the conflict will be is an unknown.

-- We do know that more TET-type attacks are planned.

-- The enemy is still hanging in around the cities. They are still trying to infiltrate into Saigon.

-- The ARVN performed well. There were no defections. There has been some underpar performance due to poor leadership.

-- The RF and the PF carried the brunt of the fighting. Many elements of the ARVN were shot down.

-- I think it will take a minimum of 3 to 4 months before the ARVN returns to its previous strength. There are 58 ineffective battalions and 90 effective battalions as of the time I left. The RF and PF situation is not entirely clear.

-- The regular troops did take more casualties than the RF and PF forces.

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-- We believe about 40,000 enemy were killed. We cannot count the number wounded and missing.

-- On the Vietnamese side, there were approximately 12,000 KIA's and wounded.

The President: What you are saying is that the ARVN has been seriously hurt?

General Wheeler: Out of 140-150 battalions, 58 are ineffective due to losses of one type or another.

General Taylor: Are all back from TET?

General Wheeler: A number are back but we still do not know.

Paul Nitze: When ARVN units fall below 60% of full strength, they then call them ineffective. This suggests that a lot of men disappeared who are neither missing, or wounded, or killed in action.

General Wheeler: I have here a paper which was written on 31 January by the Military Affairs Committee and the Current Affairs Committee of the Liberation Army. We believe this document to be authentic.

In it the Viet Congs say their principal objectives were: a general offensive to destroy the ARVN, an effort to neutralize military and political support and to generate a general uprising.

They failed to get an uprising. There was no ARVN desertions. They did not capture the military targets they set out to capture. In many cases their attacks were ill-timed and ill-coordinated.

The document continues to say that they have problems with morale, with personnel, and need to continue the general offensive. They recommend pressing on with actions. They want to concentrate on our forces and take the "must win" areas like Saigon and Hue.

They told the units to avoid attacks on U.S. forces because of the heavy casualties that would result. They postponed their "victory day" 3 to 4 months. They told their forces to continue to attack their bases and harbors and to destroy the Vietnamese units and do

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everything they could to cause defections.

There is a major problem with the ARVN withdrawing to the cities and towns. They are worried about the security in the urban areas. I pointed this out to Thieu and Ky and told them that they are letting the countryside go by default.

Thieu and Ky recognized the danger in this and both of them said "we are faced with a dilemma." They said that they cannot afford to have another TET offensive in Saigon and in other towns.

The government is most worried about maintaining the support of the people.

There are these other observations:

-- Pacification is at a halt.

-- The Viet Cong cannot roam at will in the countryside.

-- The worse situation on pacification is in I Corps north. The next worse is in I Corps south. The best pacification now is in II Corps.

-- None of the pacification programs is satisfactory to us. Bob Komer said the situation was not satisfactory anywhere.

-- As to our own forces, they are in good shape. The Air Force was not significantly degraded by the attacks. There has been an increase in helicopter losses, but there are more helicopters in Vietnam today than there were before TET.

The equipment loss rate is up in all categories.

-- Westmoreland is working to open Highway 1 in I Corps.

The President: Did we ever do anything about getting civilian contractors into these areas to build some of these bridges and other projects?

Secretary McNamara: We are going to increase the work being done by these contractors.

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General Wheeler: I asked about this. General Westmoreland said they can employ productively about 25,000 civilians.

The President: Use them to the maximum. This might save us from sending more troops from here.

General Wheeler: The construction engineers told me they have plenty of activities to keep the contractors busy.

The President: Be sure it is done.

General Wheeler: 1968 will be a critical year in the war. There is heavy fighting ahead. The losses will be high in men. The losses will be high in equipment.

The question is can the ARVN withstand another wave of attacks. The government has many problems, among them are the refugees, many civilian casualties and the continuing problem of morale.

The military situation is this: General Westmoreland must have a sufficient force in I Corps to hold securely those two northern provinces.

The enemy still has several courses of action open. They could attack Khesanh. They could leave a holding for us around Khesanh and move south to attack Quang Tri and Hue. They could attack Danang. He does have the tactical flexibility. We know he is building a road in northern provinces to use for tanks and artillery. In short, General Westmoreland has no theater reserves. He has been stripped of his reserves.

He needs reserve forces for three reasons:

1. To repulse any enemy invasion.
2. To destroy the enemy forces and their bases.
3. To exploit enemy defeats.

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It is my judgment, and the judgment of General Westmoreland, that we must move into the Delta to catalyze the ARVN into action. The margin of victory was very thin in many of the battles over the TET. The margin between defeat and victory in many areas was surprisingly narrow. In the Delta three battalions of U.S. troops were sent to help the ARVN. If it had not been for these battalions, several key province towns could have been overrun.

The second surprise I had was that we came very close to losing Tan Son Nhut Air Base. It was touch and go there. This attack was blocked by battalions coming in and hitting the enemy from the rear. It was close. Around Danang, we had another close call. We had to put people down by chopper and then move them to catch the enemy second North Vietnam Division. It was close there too.

In my opinion, and in the opinion of General Westmoreland, he needs a theater reserve of two divisions.

General Westmoreland said he was thankful for the troops which had been sent. He said they had a good affect on the ARVN and on the people.

The President: Are all of them there now?

General Wheeler: All are due there today.

The President: How long will it be before they are ready?

General Wheeler: The 82nd should be ready now. The Marine units should be ready in a few days.

Westmoreland handled this bad situation well because of three things:

1. Mobility
2. Fire power
3. Flexibility in command.

As you can see from the attached table (see attachment) General Westmoreland has asked for three packages.

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By 1 May he wants a brigade of the 5th mechanized division; 1 armed cavalry regiment; 3 artillery battalions; 4 engineer battalions; other elements of the 5th Marine division; a Marine air wing and other units.

General Westmoreland wants more armor for where there is a threat the armored cavalry regiment is good for opening and securing roads.

If the President approves this, we propose a Four Structured Planning Meeting at Honolulu with representatives of the Joint Chiefs, General Westmoreland and the service secretaries to go over these requests and get the exact details ironed out.

This total request comes to 205,000 men.

The President: What are the alternatives?

General Wheeler: The only alternative to this, in our judgment, is a decision to be prepared to give up areas in lieu of more troops. Without the reserve, we should be prepared to give up the 2 northern provinces of South Vietnam. This, of course, would be a political hazard. It also would give the North Vietnamese a strong position for negotiating. It would, I believe, cause the collapse of the ARVN.

The President: What about those 65,000 troops the ARVN was supposed to provide?

General Wheeler: You will get them. They have begun steps to draft 18 and 19 year olds. They are recalling men to active duty who haven't served 5 years. President Thieu assured me we would get more than 65,000 if they could be absorbed and supported by the U. S. Government.

General Westmoreland thinks they can go above 65,000 this year. General Westmoreland wants them to concentrate on mobilizing their army, since the ARVN are frequently outgunned by the enemy. This is one reason why they are reluctant in some cases to fight.

The President: How is the recruitment of enemy coming?

General Wheeler: This is a matter of conjecture. We do know that they have brought their forces up by at least 3,000 men.

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Prior to TET they had approximately 225,000 troops of all types. By infiltration, recruitment and other steps, they were able to get this number up to 240,000 by the time of TET. We estimate they lost 40,000 killed; 5,000 disabled; and 3,000 prisoners of war who are military types. This totals about 48,000 enemy out of action. We now estimate that they have approximately 200,000 effective fighting units.

(At 9:35 the meeting moved to the Sitting Room).

General Wheeler: There were several North Vietnamese divisions which were relatively untouched including the 9th and the 5th. On the border, the first NVA division was relatively untouched. They back-stopped main force VC units. I think the two divisions around Khesanh have taken a good shellacking.

Director Helms: I worry about those figures on casualties and enemy strength being used. I am not sure how accurate they are.

General Wheeler: They are the best we have.

Secretary Rusk: What is General Westmoreland's strategy? What are his priorities? Is he tied to the towns?

General Wheeler: He feels he must have sufficient forces to hold.

General Taylor: Can he do it with these reserves (referring to the 200,000 requested.)

General Wheeler: Yes, I believe so unless the enemy ups the ante.

The President: Are we adequately prepared for Khesanh?

General Wheeler: Yes, sir.

The President: Do you think that it will be there (Khesanh) or elsewhere?

General Wheeler: We do not know. We know that we have about 5900 men at Khesanh with a Vietnamese ranger battalion. These units are heavily supported by air and artillery. We are pouring in air.

The price the enemy would have to pay would be a very high one if they were to try to take Khesanh. General Westmoreland does not believe they can take it.

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We have been bombing the enemy very heavily outside of Khesanh. They are being pushed severely. Just this week we hit an ammo dump and set off 4 1/2 hours of secondary explosions.

Westmoreland thinks the enemy can attack Khesanh or move south toward Hue and Quang Tri.

The President: How far is that?

General Wheeler: About 60 miles. The enemy could leave a holding force in the area.

The President: As I understand it, they have 40,000 to 50,000 men in a 40 mile area. We have 5000 men in Khesanh. We would bring in by plane or by road the necessary reinforcements if this position were attacked. Is it possible that the enemy has moved in more troops?

General Wheeler: Yes, Sir, it is possible that he could have moved in more troops. We ran into 3 tanks and we know that the enemy has a brigade of paratroopers. While we are on that we need CIA to give us some good photo reconnaissance of downtown Hanoi and the production centers. In addition, one prisoner of war said he saw 20 ^{red} ~~track~~ vehicles with what appeared to be Frog missiles on them. In short, the enemy could show up with more forces in the south than they have shown before.

The President: What about our taking the initiative ourselves? Is there anything we can do other than just sitting and waiting for them to attack?

General Wheeler: As far as new bombing efforts there is nothing new in the cards. We could plan an amphibious operation in the north, but we do not have the capacity to do it at this time.

Secretary Rusk: I think the President is talking about new initiatives in I Corps moving our units to attack rather than being on the defensive.

General Wheeler: Well, the 1st Cavalry Division is engaged in offensive actions against the enemy.

The President: It seems to me for months we have been waiting for them to move. They may be recouping and replacing their losses during this time. Does he plan any surprise moves of his own?

General Wheeler: He plans to move along the road and clear it. In addition, he is sending out patrols on foot to locate the enemy and

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get prisoners and move against them when possible.

The President: So he really has not initiative of his own other than to interrupt their road building and to patrol.

General Wheeler: No, except the 1st Division is engaged against the enemy at Hue.

The President: We may get some dazzling and shocking surprises. Perhaps we have overbuilt Khesanh. It looks like the enemy can pick and choose his own time and place. Does Westmoreland have any plans to attack them? I am not questioning his strategy. I am just trying to find out what the situation really is. As I understand it, he is prepared to move with other forces to attack the enemy if they attack Khesanh. Also he is prepared to move against anything coming down into the south. If they move across the DMZ, he will counter-attack.

How many men are programmed for him?

General Wheeler: 517,000 in the next 90 days. These are part of the Program 5 package.

The President: What do you have available to send to him in the next 60 days?

General Wheeler: We have not had a chance to go over this thoroughly.

Secretary McNamara: General Westmoreland has asked for 105,000 additional men by May 1. He has asked us to do it in 60 days, but I don't think we can do it in less than 90 to 120 days.

The President: Where will these troops come from?

Secretary McNamara: They will come in two increments resulting from a call up in reserve forces. There would be two call ups in the Army, the first for 90,000 and the second for 70,000. There would be about 50 to 60 thousand marines called and about 20,000 Navy and Air Force. This would total about 250,000 in reserve call up. In addition, we would need to extend tours up to 6 months and increase the draft call in May.

The President: Then we would call up the reserves and extend enlistments up to 6 months.

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Secretary McNamara: Yes, we would ask for an extension of enlistments for 6 months for a period of authority extending for 8 months from now. No single man would stay in longer than 6 months, but the need for this authority may extend for the next 8 months.

As I see this total program, it would add 2 1/2 billion dollars to the 1968 budget. It would increase the 1969 budget by \$10 billion. It would increase the 1970 budget by about \$15 billion.

Of course, we would have to expand production of helicopters, ordnance, air power, and ground support equipment.

The President: How is the M-16 production coming? McN: [initials] Colt is working 3 shifts now on a 5 day a week basis. There will be a second source coming in. We get production of about 29,000 rifles now and expect this to be up to 40,000 by the end of the year. A total of 683,000 M-16's have been produced so far.

In addition, we would open several new camps. There would be a need to open Camp Chaffee in Arkansas and Pickett Hill in Virginia. In addition, we would open Camp Roberts in California and Indiantown Gap in Pennsylvania.

The President: Could you handle all of the equipment and supplies for all of these bases?

Secretary McNamara: Yes, the Marine units could be ready in 8 weeks. The Army units could be ready in 12 to 16 weeks. We would immediately call 57,000 Marines and 97,000 Army. At the time of the announcement we would also say that this would be followed by an additional 70,000.

The President: What type of men are these that would be called?

Secretary McNamara: They are of three types:

1. World War II and Korean Veterans
2. Men who have already fulfilled two years of active service and are now in the active reserves.
3. Men who have 6 months training and have had less active service.

There will be lots of gripping but I don't think the problem will be serious.

The President: What problems are there now?