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FORM OF DOCUMENT	CORRESPONDENTS OR TITLE	DATE	RESTRICTION
#76a notes	Notes from 3/4/68 - 5:33 p.m. meeting with Senior Foreign Policy Advisors [Sanitized NLJ 83-24] Secret 17 pp. <i>open 10-21-94 NLJ 93-461</i>	3/4/68	A
#76c memo	Draft memo for the President <i>open 3/4/02 NLJ/RAC 99-244</i> Top Secret 3 pp.	3/4/68	A
#77	[Duplicate of document #76a] <i>open 10-21-94 NLJ 93-461</i>		
#77a agenda	Agenda for 3/4/68 meeting Top Secret 2 pp. <i>open 3-1-91</i>	3/4/68	A
#77b	[Duplicate of document #76c] <i>open 3/4/02 NLJ/RAC 99-244</i>		
#78	[Duplicate of document #76a] <i>open 10-21-94 NLJ 93-461</i>		
#78a	[Duplicate of document #77a] <i>open 3-1-91</i>		
#78b	[Duplicate of document #76c] <i>open 3/4/02 NLJ/RAC 99-244</i>		

FILE LOCATION

Tom Johnson's Notes of Meetings, Box 2

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NA FORM 1429 (6-85)

SERVICE SET

75

MARCH 4, 1968 - 5:33 p.m.

MEETING WITH SENIOR FOREIGN POLICY
ADVISERS

The Vice President
Secretary Rusk
Secretary Clifford
General Wheeler
Under Secretary Nitze
CIA Director Helms
General Taylor
Secretary Fowler

Walt Rostow
George Christian
Tom Johnson
Marvin Watson
(joined for conclusion)

Mr. President:

Here are the notes of last night's
meeting.

Tom

Tom Johnson

March 5, 1968

10:30 a.m.

PS

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16a
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March 4, 1968

NOTES OF THE PRESIDENT'S MEETING
WITH SENIOR FOREIGN POLICY ADVISERS

(The Cabinet Room)

ATTENDING WERE:

The President
The Vice President
Secretary Rusk
Secretary Clifford
General Wheeler
Undersecretary Nitze
CIA Director Helms
General Maxwell Taylor
Secretary Henry Fowler
Mr. Walt Rostow
Mr. George Christian
Mr. Marvin Watson (joined for conclusion)
Mr. Tom Johnson

The meeting began at 5:33 p. m. It ended
at 7:20 p. m.

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NEJ 93-461

By inf, NARA, Date 10-12-94

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The President: As I told you last week, I wanted you to return today with your recommendations in response to General Westmoreland's request. Among the things I asked you to study were the following questions:

1. What particular forces are you recommending that we dispatch immediately? How do we get these forces?
2. How soon could we formulate what we want from the South Vietnamese?
3. What difficulties do you foresee with your recommendations, both with the Congress and financially?

(There was an Agenda for the meeting prepared by Walt Rostow. That agenda is attached as Appendix A).

As I understand it, Clark Clifford, Secretary Rusk, and Rostow and others have been meeting on these questions in conjunction with the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Walt Rostow: That is correct.

Clark Clifford: Paul Nitze and I started to work on this Friday night. As you could understand, with the time pressure we placed upon ourselves there still may need to be refinements and adjustments to the program I will discuss.

We have tried to make this document clear and understandable. (Undersecretary Nitze passed out prior to the meeting copies of a "Draft Memorandum for the President" A copy of that document is attached.)

The subject is a very profound one, and I consider it advisable to outline the difficulty we face and the central problem which your advisers see you facing.

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As you know, from time to time, the military leaders in the field ask for additional forces. We have, in the past, met these requests until we are now at the point where we have agreed to supply up to 525,000 men to General Westmoreland.

He now has asked for 205,000 additional troops. There are three questions:

1. Should the President send 205,000?
2. Should the President not send any more?
3. Should the President approve a figure somewhere in between and send an alternative number?

Your senior advisers have conferred on this matter at very great length. There is a deep-seated concern by your advisers. There is a concern that if we say, yes, and step up with the addition of 205,000 more men that we might continue down the road as we have been without accomplishing our purpose---which is for a viable South Vietnam which can live in peace.

We are not convinced that our present policy will bring us to that objective.

As I said before, we spent hours discussing this matter. For a while, we thought and had the feeling that we understood the strength of the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese. You will remember the rather optimistic reports of General Westmoreland and Ambassador Bunker last year.

Frankly, it came as a shock that the Vietcong-North Vietnamese had the strength of force and skill to mount the Tet offensive---as they did. They struck 34 cities, made strong inroads in Saigon and in Hue. There have been very definite effects felt in the countryside.

At this stage, it is clear that this new request by General Westmoreland brings the President to a clearly defined watershed:

1. Do you continue to go down that same road of "more troops, more guns, more planes, more ships?"

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2. Do you go on killing more Viet Cong and more North Vietnamese and killing more Vietcong and more North Vietnamese?

There are grave doubts that we have made the type of progress we had hoped to have made by this time. As we build up our forces, they build up theirs. We continue to fight at a higher level of intensity.

Even were we to meet this full request of 205,000 men, and the pattern continues as it has, it is likely that by March he (General Westmoreland) may want another 200,000 to 300,000 men with no end in sight.

The country we are trying to save is being subjected to enormous damage. Perhaps the country we are trying to save is relying on the United States too much. When we look ahead, we may find that we may actually be denegating their ability to take over their own country rather than contributing to their ability to do it.

We recommend in this paper that you meet the requirement for only those forces that may be needed to deal with any exigencies of the next 3-4 months. March-April-May could be an important period.

We recommend an immediate decision to deploy to Vietnam an estimated total of 22,000 additional personnel. We would agree to get them to General Westmoreland right away. It would be valuable for the general to know they are coming so he can make his plans accordingly.

This is as far as we are willing to go We would go ahead, however, and call up a sufficient number of men. If later the President decides Westmoreland needs additional reinforcements, you will have men to meet that contingency.

The President: Westmoreland is asking for 200,000 men, and you are recommending 20,000 or so?

Clark Clifford: The strategic reserves in the United States are deeply depleted. They must be built up. Senator Russell has said this. We do not know what might happen anywhere around the world, but to face any emergency we will need to strengthen the reserve.

Out of this buildup you can meet additional requests from Westmoreland in the event you decide he needs more than the 22,000 later. The first increment will meet his needs for the next three to four months.

Westmoreland must not have realized it, but it would have taken much longer than he had anticipated to provide the men and units he originally requested anyway. We could not meet that schedule.

We suggest that you go ahead and get the manpower ready. If they are not really necessary for Vietnam, they can be added to the Strategic Reserve to strengthen it.

We also feel strongly that there should be a comprehensive study of the strategic guidance to be given General Westmoreland in the future.

We are not sure the present strategy is the right strategy---that of being spread out all over the country with a seek and destroy policy.

We are not convinced that this is the right way, that it is the right long-term course to take. We are not sure under the circumstances which exist that a conventional military victory, as commonly defined, can be had.

After this study is made---if there is no clear resolution in the actions of the next 3-4 months except long drawn-out procedure---we may want to change the strategic guidance given Westmoreland. Perhaps we should not be trying to protect all of the countryside, and instead concentrate on the cities and important areas in the country.

There will be considerably higher casualties if we follow the Westmoreland plan. It just follows that if we increase our troop commitment by 200,000 men, there will be significantly higher casualties.

We may want to consider using our men as a "shield" behind which the government of South Vietnam could strengthen itself and permit the ARVN to be strengthened.

Under the present situation, there is a good deal of talk about what the Arvn "will do" but when the crunch is on, when the crunch comes, they look to us for more. When they got into the Tet offensive, Thieu's statement wasn't what more they could do but that "it is time for more U.S. troops." There is no easy answer to this.

If we continue with our present policy of adding more troops and increasing our commitment, this policy may lead us into Laos and Cambodia.

The reserve forces in North Vietnam are a cause for concern as well. They have a very substantial population from which to draw. They have no trouble whatever organizing, equipping, and training their forces.

We seem to have a sinkhole. We put in more---they match it. We put in more---they match it.

The South Vietnamese are not doing all they should do.

The Soviets and the Chinese have agreed to keep the North Vietnamese well armed and well supplied.

The Vietcong are now better armed than the ARVN.
They have:

- better rifles
- better training
- more sophisticated weapons (mortars, artillery, rockets)

I see more and more fighting with more and more casualties on the U. S. side and no end in sight to the action.

I want to give a whole new look at the whole situation. There is strong unanimity on this. If it were possible, we would want to look at the situation without sending more troops to him. But we should send the 22,000---that is, until a new policy decision is reached. And that 22,000---that will be it until that decision is made.

We can no longer rely just on the field commander. He can want troops and want troops and want troops. We must look at the overall impact on us, including the situation here in the United States. We must look at our economic stability, our other problems in the world, our other problems at home; we must consider whether or not this thing is tying us down so that we cannot do some of the other things we should be doing; and finally, we must consider the effects of our actions on the rest of the world---are we setting an example in Vietnam through which other nations would rather not go if they are faced with a similar threat?

It is out of caution and for protection that we recommend these additional forces.

Now the time has come to decide where do we go from here.

I can assure the President that we can reexamine this situation with complete protection to our present position.

We do recommend the following actions:

1. A callup of reserve units and individuals totaling approximately 262,000. (194,000 in units; 68,000 as individuals)
2. An increase in the draft calls
3. Extension of terms of service.

These actions would produce a total increase in strength in the Armed Forces of approximately 511,000 by June 30, 1969.

This proposal includes 31,600 troops for deployment to South Korea. I would oppose that. It also includes a U. S. navy unit.

If the troops for South Korea and the naval units are disapproved, the figures would be decreased to approximately 242,000 reservists called up and 454,000 total increase in troop strength.

If you do wish to meet the additional troop request, or further demands of Westmoreland you can do it out of this pool of 242,000 .

If you did not, the Strategic Reserve would be strengthened by their addition. This would, in the opinion of the JCS, put the Strategic Reserve "just about right."

You need to have that type of reserve in times such as these.

As part and parcel of policy decisions, it is important to have a very clear understanding with the government of South Vietnam. They should know that your eventual decision about more troops and more use of U. S. support depends to a large part on their attitude.

We should tell the South Vietnamese that the General has asked for 200,000 more troops, but we are giving only 25,000. We should let them know that you are delaying your decision until you know what the GVN will do about:

- removal of the poor unit commanders
- meaningful steps to eliminate corruption
- meeting their own leadership responsibilities
- not only saying they will do something, but meaning it as well.

If they are not, we should know it now.

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I suggest you allow yourself greater degree of latitude and flexibility. There possibly is another plan which can be utilized. There may be another way to avoid more bloodshed to us, possibly by letting go some areas.

We should consider changing our concept from one of protecting real estate to protecting people. We need to see if these people are really going to take care of themselves eventually. I am not sure we can ever find our way out if we continue to shovel men into Vietnam.

We have looked at all your questions. The answers to each of them are included in the context of the document before you tonight.

We say, for example, that this is not the time to negotiate.

We have spent the last three days trying to reach a consensus. As we sat together and cross-fertilized, we have reached a general consensus on this.

Of course, if we had to vote on sending the straight 200,000 men or no men, we would come out all over the lot...we would be split all over the place.

But we wonder if we are really making progress toward our goal under the plan we have been following.

This is the overall approach we would recommend.

The President: Does this change the tour of duty?

General Wheeler: The tour of duty in Vietnam is not changed. We feel this is an essential reason for the high morale. It is the total length of service which will be lengthened.

The President: Does it affect the man with 4 years service the same as the draftee?

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General Wheeler: Yes, sir. It would apply to all types. Of course, there are some men we would not want to extend.

The President: Have we done this before (extend tours) ?

Undersecretary Nitze: Yes, sir. At least twice. At one time, the Secretary of the Navy had the authority to do this. I did it for a period during Vietnam. The Congress took this authority away last year to put it on an equal basis with the other services.

General Wheeler: We did it at the same time of the Berlin airlift. Also during the Cuban missile crisis, I believe.

Secretary Rusk: Mr. President, without a doubt, this will be one of the most serious decisions you will have made since becoming President. This has implications for all of our society.

First, on the review of strategic guidance: we want the Vietnamese to do their full share and be able to survive when we leave. This was one of the things that saved us in Korea. The question is whether substantial additional troops would eventually increase or decrease South Vietnamese strength.

We may very well find that there are equipment factors that would create competition among our new U. S. forces being sent out to Vietnam and the South Vietnamese. Many of us would like to see the ARVN equipped better and supplied with the M-16 rifles.

We must also consider what would happen to our NATO troop policies. To reduce NATO troops is a serious matter indeed.

We have also got to think of what this troop increase would mean in terms of increased taxes, the balance of payments picture, inflation, gold, and the general economic picture.

We should study moving away from the geographic approach of Vietnam strategy to a demographic approach.

On the negotiation front, I wish we had a formula to bring about a peaceful settlement soon. We do not. The North Vietnamese are pressing against Laos and Thailand. The Chinese are leaning against Burma and Cambodia.

During the day we had two additional comebacks on two probes which we made. The Shah of Iran saw Hanoi's representative. The Hanoi representative pressed the Shah to get us to accept some of their conditions---those Hanoi had laid down. He said he wanted to see the Shah again.

The Rumanian was in again. I asked him if after the winter-spring offensive the Hanoi government would take a different position. He said he thought they were giving some thought to it.

But the negotiation track is quite bleak at the current time.

I think we should make public some of our peace efforts. Clark Clifford has outlined well the problems. Appendix G and H will show the divisive element we must face if we move forward with this decision.

The President: Why not an extension of enlistments at the same time of the callup of reserves? Why can't we have the callup now, with the extension of enlistments later if needed?

General Wheeler: The extension is the best way to quickly build up the Strategic Reserve. We need men with leadership and experience to train new men and to expand and improve our replacements.

Nitze: We could say that no man would be extended for more than a certain period of time.

W heeler: On that point (whether Congress will go for an extension of enlistments) you have a better feel than I.

President: Russell says you must call up reserves before extending enlistments.

Wheeler: The callup must be phased anyway. When you announce callup, you should announce the dates of the callup of the units.

I talked to the JCS today. General Chapman says he needs a certain number of Marine Reserves to fill out the 4th Marine Wing.

Clifford: I suggest a package approach including:

- the callup of reserves
- extension of enlistments
- callup of individuals

By time Congress took action on the extension, we would be calling men up anyway. If we did not get extensions we would be along with the regular unit callup anyway.

President : I don't question the need for a callup. How many men can you get by voluntary extensions.

Nitze: Very few. We got only 900 last time.

President: What about incentives?

Wheeler: We have some very good incentives.

President: How much of an increase in draft calls?

Nitze: About an increase of 150,000 men in 6 months. The draft call is up to 48,000. They have been running 30,000. The increase would have them running about 45,000.

President: How about men who haven't served?

Wheeler: They are not as well trained. We need men with experience.

In FY 68, 341,000 men are to be inducted. Need an additional 100,000 this year.

Rusk: What is annual increment of inductees?

Wheeler: We have enormous pool of men available.

President: How many in Project 100,000?

Nitze: 60,000 approximately. In Phase I, quota was 40,000. There were 49,000 volunteered. In Phase II, there is a quota of 100,000. In first three months, 31,000 have volunteered. That is far above quota for that period.

Fowler: We would need an entirely new fiscal program to offset expenditures dollar for dollar. I would forecast an increase in expenditures of \$2.5 billion in fiscal 68 and \$10 billion in fiscal 69. There would be an adverse balance of payments impact of \$500 million.

The adoption of this program would require a new fiscal program. These things are necessary:

- a new fiscal package
- a new mutual security package (separating all project assistance for South Vietnam, Thailand, and Korea from the current foreign aid arrangement)
- agreement on reserve management
- Increase in the tax proposal so that we could offset expenditures
- Cut low priority civilian programs (A \$2-\$3 billion cut in program outlays would be required).

An increase in the force level by 500,000 men would put pressure on manpower and employment. The cream of the labor force, men twenty years of age or older, already is way down low in unemployment.

We will have some area and skill shortages. This will have its pluses and its minuses. We could then begin to focus out training and manpower development programs on a specific area or specific skill. We could, by this, minimize the manpower shortages.

We would have to have additional procurement. There would need to be an assessment of materiel and supply program. Also judgments must be made on our economic and stabilization policies. I would ask Okum, Martin, Zwick and I to determine if---

---standby credit controls should be used

---we should have authority to deal with flareups in the wage-price field.

Dick Helms: I feel that the study of the last 3-4 days has shown that we must replenish our Strategic Reserve. If you look at conditions throughout the world, you can easily see that we need it.

Rusk: I would go to Congress for specifics actions not for a statement of policy such as the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. We do not want a general declaration.

President: In the Senate we face a real problem. Anything that requires any authority may result in a filibuster.

Wheeler: If we could provide Westy with the troops he wants I would recommend they be sent. They cannot be provided. This (the 22,000) is what we can do by 15 June.

I find nothing wrong with going along with this track. I recommend these additional forces: 4 battalions of infantry; 3 tactical fighter squadrons; an additional 6 tactical fighter squadrons (2 by 1 April; 3 by 1 May; 1 by 1 June); 1 Marine RLT of the 4th Marine Division; and 1 Battalion of Seabees (700 men).

This is all we can do by 15 June.

With the callup of the reserves, you still can meet Westmoreland's request by 1 September and 1 December---but not by May 1.

President: Why Seabees?

Wheeler: We need to expand that unit of personnel.

Walt Rostow: There are two matters that need to be looked into in this study:

1. The question of North Vietnamese Reserves. There are two schools of thought on this. Some believe they can put additional men into battle easily, and match our forces. Some think they are limited.

2. I think we should cast aside the generalities about military solution vs. diplomatic solution; or population strategy vs. real estate protection.

I agree we must build up the ARVN and the GVN. They are the reason we are there. Ought to bring them along on the Southern solution. That is, we need to talk candidly with them and develop a frank dialogue about the matters between us.

We need to look for a fresh summary of the reasons for mining Haiphong. There may be additional military steps to resolve the matter sooner.

The Russians really have not had difficult choices. We should look at a course of harder as well as softer policy.

Nitze: I differ with Walt on that. We need to build up the Arvn and the government. The real impact depends on whether the ARVN can pick themselves up. We must use the ARVN more effectively.

It is clear that our strategic reserves are inadequate. We must rebuild them.

Wheeler: Prior to Vietnam, the Strategic Reserves had 12 divisions (9 Army and 3 Marines).

Now they have 4 2/3 Army (none of which are deployable) and 1 1/9 Marines (not deployable).

Nitze: We must get into negotiations some time soon. These fellows are not necessarily the key (the contacts such as the Rumanian or the Shah).

We must make up our own minds when we want to cease the bombings and see what happens.

We have to look at what we can do to get into negotiations. We must choose our own time. We should do this no later than May or June.

Rusk: We could stop the bombing during the rainy period in the North.

President: Really "get on your horses" on that.

Vice President: I have no comment on anything. I really just have been learning tonight.

General Taylor: We are all for this recommendation tonight---but all for different reasons. I frankly was startled to learn that we can't send more than 22,000 men.

I also want to know if this is a year of despair or a year of opportunity. I think it is the latter.

Westy may get into trouble between now and June. He could lose a lot of politically valuable terrain.

We should bear this in mind. The first three pages of the document. I agree with that.

The tab on new Strategic Guidance. I agree we should review this, but we may not be able to reduce the blood requirement, the troop requirement, and the other necessities.

Let's not delude ourselves about the ARVN. They will try--they

will give us the right answers---but don't count on them to do too much in a short period of time.

President: Have you told Westmoreland you would only send this number and we could give no more by June 1?

Wheeler: No, I will tell him after this meeting.

President: Tell him to forget the 100,000. Tell him 22,000 is all we can give at the moment.

Rusk: I see new fighting has begun.

Wheeler: They are planning to crank up a new offensive. I told Westy that combined operations would draw the Arvn out.

President: If the ARVN are not equipped as well as the Vietcong, isn't that a sad commentary on us?

Nitze: It may be possible to supply all ARVN with M-16s, and grenade launchers and machine guns. We have armed personnel carriers on the way out to Westmoreland now.

Wheeler: We are also shipping tanks and choppers.

President: Have we gotten through the engine bottleneck on the choppers?

Nitze: No

President: Let's do everything we can on choppers. Otherwsie, I am going to bring that over here to handle. Get them working six day weeks, if necessary.

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76c

4 March 1968

DRAFT MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

General Westmoreland has requested an additional 205,000 troops (beyond the 525,000 personnel now authorized). He asks for the deployment in three packages, by May 1, September 1 and December 31.

General Wheeler believes we should prepare ourselves to meet the request for an additional 205,000 personnel and should act to increase and improve our strategic reserve in the United States. An initial staff examination of requirements indicates that to achieve both will require:

- a. A call-up of reserve units and individuals totaling approximately 262,000 (194,000 in units, 68,000 as individuals).
- b. Increased draft calls.
- c. Extension of terms of service. These actions would produce a total increase in end strength in the Armed Forces of approximately 511,000 by June 30, 1969. (The staff examination referred to above included spaces to add 31,500 troops in South Korea and a US naval proposal to add two cruisers and fifteen destroyers to the naval forces in Southeast Asia. If these proposals are disapproved in their entirety, the figures above will be decreased to approximately 242,000 and 454,000 respectively.)

A build-up of roughly these dimensions would enable us to meet the Westmoreland request and, in any event, would reconstitute the strategic reserve in the United States.

We recommend:

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By J, NARA, Date 2-19-02

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1. An immediate decision to deploy to Vietnam an estimated total of 22,000 additional personnel (approximately 60% of which would be combat). An immediate decision to deploy the three tactical fighter squadrons deferred from Program 5 (about 1,000 men). This would be over and above the four battalions (about 3700 men) already planned for deployment in April which in themselves would bring us slightly above the 525,000 authorized level. The argument for this immediate action, and detailed schedules of availability is contained in Tab A.

2. Either through Ambassador Bunker or through an early visit by Secretary Clifford, a highly forceful approach to the GVN (Thieu and Ky) to get certain key commitments for improvement, tied to our own increased effort and to increased US support for the ARVN. Details are in Tab B.

3. Early approval of a Reserve call-up and an increased end strength adequate to meet the balance of the Westmoreland request and to restore a strategic reserve in the United States, adequate for possible contingencies world-wide. Supporting discussion and details are in Tab C.

4. Reservation of the decision to meet the Westmoreland request in full. While we would be putting ourselves in a position to make these additional deployments, the future decision to do so would be contingent upon:

- a. Reexamination on a week-by-week basis of the desirability of further deployments as the situation develops;
- b. Improved political performance by the GVN and increased

contribution in effective military action by the ARVN;

c. The results of a study in depth, to be initiated immediately, of possible new political and strategic guidance for the conduct of US operations in South Vietnam, and of our Vietnamese policy in the context of our world-wide politico-military strategy. Supporting discussion is in Tab D.

5. No new peace initiative on Vietnam. Re-statement of our terms for peace and certain limited diplomatic actions to dramatize Laos and to focus attention on the total threat to Southeast Asia. Details in Tab E.

6. A general decision on bombing policy, not excluding future change, but adequate to form a basis for discussion with the Congress on this key aspect. Here your advisers are divided:

a. General Wheeler and others would advocate a substantial extension of targets and authority in and near Hanoi and Haiphong, mining of Haiphong, and naval gunfire up to a Chinese Buffer Zone;

b. Others would advocate a seasonal step-up through the spring, but without these added elements.

The opposing arguments are in Tab F.

* * * * *

In proposing this course of action, we recognize that there are certain difficulties and negative factors, outlined in Tab G. Additional problems we can anticipate in US public opinion are at Tab H. Nevertheless, we believe that this course of action, in its essential outline at least, is urgently required to meet the immediate situation in Vietnam as well as wider possible contingencies there and elsewhere.

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MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

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Authority NLS 83-24

By is, NARS, Date 11-4-83

Meeting with the President
Monday, March 4, 1968, 5:30 P. M.

AGENDA

1. Presentation of report by Sect. Clifford and explanation by him of its substance.
2. General comments

You may wish to go around the table and ask for observations by Sect. Rusk, Sect. Fowler, Gen. Wheeler, and others.

Key questions: You may then wish to ask the following questions:

-- (Gen. Wheeler) What is the likelihood of Gen. Westmoreland finding himself in a desperate military situation in the course of the next three months?

-- (Gen. Wheeler) Are there any measures that we might take at such a time to assist him if such a situation could arise?

-- (Gen. Wheeler) Have we contingency plans prepared for such an occasion? What particular forces are you recommending that we dispatch immediately, and in what ways might they help Gen. Westmoreland in the next three months?

-- (Sect. Rusk) How soon could we formulate what we want from the South Vietnamese and get an assessment from Bunker and Westmoreland as to the likelihood of their performance?

-- (Gen. Wheeler) Is there a lower level at which we could reconstitute our Reserves and meet the general objectives of Sect. Clifford's recommendation?

-- (Gen. Wheeler and Mr. Helms) If Westy and the South Vietnamese turn back the winter-spring offensive, what are the odds on our making 1968 a favorable year of decision; what role would the additional forces Westy has requested play in such an offensive operation?

-- (Sect. Rusk) What negotiating stance should we and the South Vietnamese adopt if we come through in good shape with some forward momentum in May or June?

-- (Sect. Clifford and Gen. Wheeler) What difficulties do you perceive with these recommendations in the Armed Services Committees?

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-- (Sect. Fowler) What difficulties do you perceive with the financial committees?

-- (Sect. Rusk) How would we handle the Foreign Affairs and Foreign Relations Committees and, in particular, cope with the anti-Vietnam group in the Senate?

-- (Sects. Rusk and Clifford) How would we present the justification for this program to the Congress and to our people? What consultations do you recommend before we move?

3. Depending on your own judgment at the end of the session, you may wish either to:

-- postpone a decision until you can talk alone with a smaller group, including particularly Secretaries Rusk and Clifford; or

-- direct Secretary Clifford and General Wheeler to undertake the consultations which were yesterday postponed; that is, with Senators Russell and Dirksen; Congressman Rivers; and, via General Goodpaster, with General Eisenhower.

4. Once you have come to a decision, you will need urgent refinement of military, diplomatic, and financial staff work.

W. W. Rostow

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MR. Secretary -

Would you please read
your presentation and
correct where appropriate

Tom J.

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March 4, 1968

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NOTES OF THE PRESIDENT'S MEETING
WITH SENIOR FOREIGN POLICY ADVISERS

(The Cabinet Room)

ATTENDING WERE:

The President
The Vice President
Secretary Rusk
Secretary Clifford
General Wheeler
Undersecretary Nitze
CIA Director Helms
General Maxwell Taylor
Secretary Henry Fowler
Mr. Walt Rostow
Mr. George Christian
Mr. Marvin Watson (joined for conclusion)
Mr. Tom Johnson

The meeting began at 5:33 p.m. It ended
at 7:20 p.m.

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E.O. 12958, Sec. 3.4

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By if, RAB/1, Date 10-12-94

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The President: As I told you last week, I wanted you to return today with your recommendations in response to General Westmoreland's request. Among the things I asked you to study were the following questions:

1. What particular forces are you recommending that we dispatch immediately? How do we get these forces?
2. How soon could we formulate what we want from the South Vietnamese?
3. What difficulties do you foresee with your recommendations, both with the Congress and financially?

(There was an Agenda for the meeting prepared by Walt Rostow. That agenda is attached as Appendix A).

As I understand it, Clark Clifford, Secretary Rusk, and Rostow and others have been meeting on these questions in conjunction with the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Walt Rostow: That is correct.

Clark Clifford: Paul Nitze and I started to work on this Friday night. As you could understand, with the time pressure we placed upon ourselves there still may need to be refinements and adjustments to the program I will discuss.

We have tried to make this document clear and understandable. (Undersecretary Nitze passed out prior to the meeting copies of a "Draft Memorandum for the President" A copy of that document is attached.)

The subject is a very profound one, and I consider it advisable to outline the difficulty we face and the central problem which your advisers see you facing.

As you know, from time to time, the military leaders in the field ask for additional forces. We have, in the past, met these requests until we are now at the point where we have agreed to supply up to 525,000 men to General Westmoreland.

He now has asked for 205,000 additional troops. There are three questions:

1. Should the President send 205,000?
2. Should the President not send any more?
3. Should the President approve a figure somewhere in between and send an alternative number?

Your senior advisers have conferred on this matter at very great length. There is a deep-seated concern by your advisers. There is a concern that if we say, yes, and step up with the addition of 205,000 more men that we might continue down the road as we have been without accomplishing our purpose---which is for a viable South Vietnam which can live in peace.

We are not convinced that our present policy will bring us to that objective.

As I said before, we spent hours discussing this matter. For a while, we thought and had the feeling that we understood the strength of the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese. You will remember the rather optimistic reports of General Westmoreland and Ambassador Bunker last year.

Frankly, it came as a shock that the Vietcong-North Vietnamese had the strength of force and skill to mount the Tet offensive---as they did. They struck 34 cities, made strong inroads in Saigon and in Hue. There have been very definite effects felt in the countryside.

At this stage, it is clear that this new request by General Westmoreland brings the President to a clearly defined watershed:

1. Do you continue to go down that same road of "more troops, more guns, more planes, more ships?"

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2. Do you go on killing more Viet Cong and more North Vietnamese and killing more Vietcong and more North Vietnamese?

There are grave doubts that we have made the type of progress we had hoped to have made by this time. As we build up our forces, they build up theirs. We continue to fight at a higher level of intensity.

Even were we to meet this full request of 205,000 men, and the pattern continues as it has, it is likely that by March he (General Westmoreland) may want another 200,000 to 300,000 men with no end in sight.

The country we are trying to save is being subjected to enormous damage. Perhaps the country we are trying to save is relying on the United States too much. When we look ahead, we may find that we may actually be denegating their ability to take over their own country rather than contributing to their ability to do it.

We recommend in this paper that you meet the requirement for only those forces that may be needed to deal with any exigencies of the next 3-4 months. March-April-May could be an important period.

We recommend an immediate decision to deploy to Vietnam an estimated total of 22,000 additional personnel. We would agree to get them to General Westmoreland right away. It would be valuable for the general to know they are coming so he can make his plans accordingly.

This is as far as we are willing to go We would go ahead, however, and call up a sufficient number of men. If later the President decides Westmoreland needs additional reinforcements, you will have men to meet that contingency.

The President: Westmoreland is asking for 200,000 men, and you are recommending 20,000 or so?

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Clark Clifford: The strategic reserves in the United States are deeply depleted. They must be built up. Senator Russell has said this. We do not know what might happen anywhere around the world, but to face any emergency we will need to strengthen the reserve.

Out of this buildup you can meet additional requests from Westmoreland in the event you decide he needs more than the 22,000 later. The first increment will meet his needs for the next three to four months.

Westmoreland must not have realized it, but it would have taken much longer than he had anticipated to provide the men and units he originally requested anyway. We could not meet that schedule.

We suggest that you go ahead and get the manpower ready. If they are not really necessary for Vietnam, they can be added to the Strategic Reserve to strengthen it.

We also feel strongly that there should be a comprehensive study of the strategic guidance to be given General Westmoreland in the future.

We are not sure the present strategy is the right strategy---that of being spread out all over the country with a seek and destroy policy.

We are not convinced that this is the right way, that it is the right long-term course to take. We are not sure under the circumstances which exist that a conventional military victory, as commonly defined, can be had.

After this study is made---if there is no clear resolution in the actions of the next 3-4 months except long drawn-out procedure---we may want to change the strategic guidance given Westmoreland. Perhaps we should not be trying to protect all of the countryside, and instead concentrate on the cities and important areas in the country.

There will be considerably higher casualties if we follow the Westmoreland plan. It just follows that if we increase our troop commitment by 200,000 men, there will be significantly higher casualties.

We may want to consider using our men as a "shield" behind which the government of South Vietnam could strengthen itself and permit the ARVN to be strengthened.

Under the present situation, there is a good deal of talk about what the Arvn "will do" but when the crunch is on, when the crunch comes, they look to us for more. When they got into the Tet offensive, Thieu's statement wasn't what more they could do but that "it is time for more U. S. troops." There is no easy answer to this.

If we continue with our present policy of adding more troops and increasing our commitment, this policy may lead us into Laos and Cambodia.

The reserve forces in North Vietnam are a cause for concern as well. They have a very substantial population from which to draw. They have no trouble whatever organizing, equipping, and training their forces.

We seem to have a sinkhole. We put in more---they match it. We put in more---they match it.

The South Vietnamese are not doing all they should do.

The Soviets and the Chinese have agreed to keep the North Vietnamese well armed and well supplied.

The Vietcong are now better armed than the ARVN.
They have:

- better rifles
- better training
- =more sophisticated weapons (mortars, artillery, rockets)

I see more and more fighting with more and more casualties on the U. S. side and no end in sight to the action.

I want to give a whole new look at the whole situation. There is strong unanimity on this. If it were possible, we would want to look at the situation without sending more troops to him. But we should send the 22,000---that is, until a new policy decision is reached. And that 22,000---that will be it until that decision is made.

We can no longer rely just on the field commander. He can want troops and want troops and want troops. We must look at the overall impact on us, including the situation here in the United States. We must look at our economic stability, our other problems in the world, our other problems at home; we must consider whether or not this thing is tying us down so that we cannot do some of the other things we should be doing; and finally, we must consider the effects of our actions on the rest of the world---are we setting an example in Vietnam through which other nations would rather not go if they are faced with a similar threat?

It is out of caution and for protection that we recommend these additional forces.

Now the time has come to decide where do we go from here.

I can assure the President that we can reexamine this situation with complete protection to our present position.

We do recommend the following actions:

1. A callup of reserve units and individuals totaling approximately 262,000. (194,000 in units; 68,000 as individuals)
2. An increase in the draft calls
3. Extension of terms of service.

These actions would produce a total increase in strength in the Armed Forces of approximately 511,000 by June 30, 1969.

This proposal includes 31,600 troops for deployment to South Korea. I would oppose that. It also includes a U. S. navy unit.

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If the troops for South Korea and the naval units are disapproved, the figures would be decreased to approximately 242,000 reservists called up and 454,000 total increase in troop strength.

If you do wish to meet the additional troop request, or further demands of Westmoreland you can do it out of this pool of 242,000 .

If you did not, the Strategic Reserve would be strengthened by their addition. This would, in the opinion of the JCS, put the Strategic Reserve "just about right."

You need to have that type of reserve in times such as these.

As part and parcel of policy decisions, it is important to have a very clear understanding with the government of South Vietnam. They should know that your eventual decision about more troops and more use of U.S. support depends to a large part on their attitude.

We should tell the South Vietnamese that the General has asked for 200,000 more troops, but we are giving only 25,000. We should let them know that you are delaying your decision until you know what the GVN will do about:

- removal of the poor unit commanders
- meaningful steps to eliminate corruption
- meeting their own leadership responsibilities
- not only saying they will do something, but meaning it as well.

If they are not, we should know it now.

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I suggest you allow yourself greater degree of latitude and flexibility. There possibly is another plan which can be utilized. There may be another way to avoid more bloodshed to us, possibly by letting go some areas.

We should consider changing our concept from one of protecting real estate to protecting people. We need to see if these people are really going to take care of themselves eventually. I am not sure we can ever find our way out if we continue to shovel men into Vietnam.

We have looked at all your questions. The answers to each of them are included in the context of the document before you tonight.

We say, for example, that this is not the time to negotiate.

We have spent the last three days trying to reach a consensus. As we sat together and cross-fertilized, we have reached a general consensus on this.

Of course, if we had to vote on sending the straight 200,000 men or no men, we would come out all over the lot... we would be split all over the place.

But we wonder if we are really making progress toward our goal under the plan we have been following.

This is the overall approach we would recommend.

The President: Does this change the tour of duty?

General Wheeler: The tour of duty in Vietnam is not changed. We feel this is an essential reason for the high morale. It is the total length of service which will be lengthened.

The President: Does it affect the man with 4 years service the same as the draftee?

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General Wheeler: Yes, sir. It would apply to all types. Of course, there are some men we would not want to extend.

The President: Have we done this before (extend tours) ?

Undersecretary Nitze: Yes, sir. At least twice. At one time, the Secretary of the Navy had the authority to do this. I did it for a period during Vietnam. The Congress took this authority away last year to put it on an equal basis with the other services.

General Wheeler: We did it at the same time of the Berlin airlift. Also during the Cuban missile crisis, I believe.

Secretary Rusk: Mr. President, without a doubt, this will be one of the most serious decisions you will have made since becoming President. This has implications for all of our society.

First, on the review of strategic guidance: we want the Vietnamese to do their full share and be able to survive when we leave. This was one of the things that saved us in Korea. The question is whether substantial additional troops would eventually increase or decrease South Vietnamese strength.

We may very well find that there are equipment factors that would create competition among our new U. S. forces being sent out to Vietnam and the South Vietnamese. Many of us would like to see the ARVN equipped better and supplied with the M-16 rifles.

We must also consider what would happen to our NATO troop policies. To reduce NATO troops is a serious matter indeed.

We have also got to think of what this troop increase would mean in terms of increased taxes, the balance of payments picture, inflation, gold, and the general economic picture.

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We should study moving away from the geographic approach of Vietnam strategy to a demographic approach.

On the negotiation front, I wish we had a formula to bring about a peaceful settlement soon. We do not. The North Vietnamese are pressing against Laos and Thailand. The Chinese are leaning against Burma and Cambodia.

During the day we had two additional comebacks on two probes which we made. The Shah of Iran saw Hanoi's representative. The Hanoi representative pressed the Shah to get us to accept some of their conditions---those Hanoi had laid down. He said he wanted to see the Shah again.

The Rumanian was in again. I asked him if after the winter-spring offensive the Hanoi government would take a different position. He said he thought they were giving some thought to it.

But the negotiation track is quite bleak at the current time.

I think we should make public some of our peace efforts. Clark Clifford has outlined well the problems. Appendix G and H will show the divisive element we must face if we move forward with this decision.

The President: Why not an extension of enlistments at the same time of the callup of reserves? Why can't we have the callup now, with the extension of enlistments later if needed?

General Wheeler: The extension is the best way to quickly build up the Strategic Reserve. We need men with leadership and experience to train new men and to expand and improve our replacements.

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Nitze: We could say that no man would be extended for more than a certain period of time.

W heeler: On that point (whether Congress will go for an extension of enlistments) you have a better feel than I.

President: Russell says you must call up reserves before extending enlistments.

Wheeler: The callup must be phased anyway. When you announce callup, you should announce the dates of the callup of the units.

I talked to the JCS today. General Chapman says he needs a certain number of Marine Reserves to fill out the 4th Marine Wing.

Clifford: I suggest a package approach including:

- the callup of reserves
- extension of enlistments
- callup of individuals

By time Congress took action on the extension, we would be calling men up anyway. If we did not get extensions we would be along with the regular unit callup anyway.

President : I don't question the need for a callup. How many men can you get by voluntary extensions.

Nitze: Very few. We got only 900 last time.

President: What about incentives?

Wheeler: We have some very good incentives.

President: How much of an increase in draft calls?

Nitze: About an increase of 150,000 men in 6 months. The draft call is up to 48,000. They have been running 30,000. The increase would have them running about 45,000.

President: How about men who haven't served?

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Wheeler: They are not as well trained. We need men with experience.

In FY 68, 341,000 men are to be inducted. Need an additional 100,000 this year.

Rusk: What is annual increment of inductees?

Wheeler: We have enormous pool of men available.

President: How many in Project 100,000?

Nitze: 60,000 approximately. In Phase I, quota was 40,000. There were 49,000 volunteered. In Phase II, there is a quota of 100,000. In first three months, 31,000 have volunteered. That is far above quota for that period.

Fowler: We would need an entirely new fiscal program to offset expenditures dollar for dollar. I would forecast an increase in expenditures of \$2.5 billion in fiscal 68 and \$10 billion in fiscal 69. There would be an adverse balance of payments impact of \$500 million.

The adoption of this program would require a new fiscal program. These things are necessary:

---a new fiscal package

---a new mutual security package (separating all project assistance for South Vietnam, Thailand, and Korea from the current foreign aid arrangement)

---agreement on reserve management

---Increase in the tax proposal so that we could offset expenditures

---Cut low priority civilian programs (A \$2-\$3 billion cut in program outlays would be required).

An increase in the force level by 500,000 men would put pressure on manpower and employment. The cream of the labor force, men twenty years of age or older, already is way down low in unemployment.

We will have some area and skill shortages. This will have its pluses and its minuses. We could then begin to focus out training and manpower development programs on a specific area or specific skill. We could, by this, minimize the manpower shortages.

We would have to have additional procurement. There would need to be an assessment of materiel and supply program. Also judgments must be made on our economic and stabilization policies. I would ask Okum, Martin, Zwick and I to determine if---

---standby credit controls should be used

---we should have authority to deal with flareups in the wage-price field.

Dick Helms: I feel that the study of the last 3-4 days has shown that we must replenish our Strategic Reserve. If you look at conditions throughout the world, you can easily see that we need it.

Rusk: I would go to Congress for specific actions not for a statement of policy such as the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. We do not want a general declaration.

President: In the Senate we face a real problem. Anything that requires any authority may result in a filibuster.

Wheeler: If we could provide Westy with the troops he wants I would recommend they be sent. They cannot be provided. This (the 22,000) is what we can do by 15 June.

I find nothing wrong with going along with this track. I recommend these additional forces: 4 battalions of infantry; 3 tactical fighter squadrons; an additional 6 tactical fighter squadrons (2 by 1 April; 3 by 1 May; 1 by 1 June); 1 Marine RLT of the 4th Marine Division; and 1 Battalion of Seabees (700 men).

This is all we can do by 15 June.

With the callup of the reserves, you still can meet Westmoreland's request by 1 September and 1 December---but not by May 1.

President: Why Seabees?

Wheeler: We need to expand that unit of personnel.

Walt Rostow: There are two matters that need to be looked into in this study:

1. The question of North Vietnamese Reserves. There are two schools of thought on this. Some believe they can put additional men into battle easily., and match our forces. Some think they are limited.

2. I think we should cast aside the generalities about military solution vs. diplomatic solution; or population strategy vs. real estate protection.

I agree we must build up the ARVN and the GVN. They are the reason we are there. Ought to bring them along on the Southern solution. That is, we need to talk candidly with them and develop a frank dialogue about the matters between us.

We need to look for a fresh summary of the reasons for mining Haiphong. There may be additional military steps to resolve the matter sooner.

The Russians really have not had difficult choices. We should look at a course of harder as well as softer policy.

Nitze: I differ with Walt on that. We need to build up the Arvn and the government. The real impact depends on whether the ARVN can pick themselves up. We must use the ARVN more effectively.

It is clear that our strategic reserves are inadequate. We must rebuild them.

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Wheeler: Prior to Vietnam, the Strategic Reserves had 12 divisions (9 Army and 3 Marines).

Now they have 4 2/3 Army (none of which are deployable) and 1 1/9 Marines (not deployable).

Nitze: We must get into negotiations some time soon. These fellows are not necessarily the key (the contacts such as the Rumanian or the Shah).

We must make up our own minds when we want to cease the bombings and see what happens.

We have to look at what we can do to get into negotiations. We must choose our own time. We should do this no later than May or June.

Rusk: We could stop the bombing during the rainy period in the North.

President: Really "get on your horses" on that.

Vice President: I have no comment on anything. I really just have been learning tonight.

General Taylor: We are all for this recommendation tonight---but all for different reasons. I frankly was startled to learn that we can't send more than 22,000 men.

I also want to know if this is a year of despair or a year of opportunity. I think it is the latter.

Westy may get into trouble between now and June. He could lose a lot of politically valuable terrain.

We should bear this in mind. The first three pages of the document. I agree with that.

The tab on new Strategic Guidance. I agree we should review this, but we may not be able to reduce the blood requirement, the troop requirement, and the other necessities.

Let's not delude ourselves about the ARVN. They will try--they

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will give us the right answers---but don't count on them to do too much in a short period of time.

President: Have you told Westmoreland you would only send this number and we could give no more by June 1?

Wheeler: No, I will tell him after this meeting.

President: Tell him to forget the 100,000. Tell him 22,000 is all we can give at the moment.

Rusk: I see new fighting has begun.

Wheeler: They are planning to crank up a new offensive. I told Westy that combined operations would draw the Arvn out.

President: If the ARVN are not equipped as well as the Vietcong, isn't that a sad commentary on us?

Nitze: It may be possible to supply all ARVN with M-16s, and grenade launchers and machine guns. We have armed personnel carriers on the way out to Westmoreland now.

Wheeler: We are also shipping tanks and choppers.

President: Have we gotten through the engine bottleneck on the choppers?

Nitze: No

President: Let's do everything we can on choppers. Otherwsie, I am going to bring that over here to handle. Get them working six day weeks, if necessary.

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THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

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Meeting with the President
Monday, March 4, 1968, 5:30 P. M.

AGENDA

1. Presentation of report by Sect. Clifford and explanation by him of its substance.
2. General comments.

You may wish to go around the table and ask for observations by Sect. Rusk, Sect. Fowler, Gen. Wheeler, and others.

Key questions: You may then wish to ask the following questions:

-- (Gen. Wheeler) What is the likelihood of Gen. Westmoreland finding himself in a desperate military situation in the course of the next three months?

-- (Gen. Wheeler) Are there any measures that we might take at such a time to assist him if such a situation could arise?

-- (Gen. Wheeler) Have we contingency plans prepared for such an occasion? What particular forces are you recommending that we dispatch immediately, and in what ways might they help Gen. Westmoreland in the next three months?

-- (Sect. Rusk) How soon could we formulate what we want from the South Vietnamese and get an assessment from Bunker and Westmoreland as to the likelihood of their performance?

-- (Gen. Wheeler) Is there a lower level at which we could reconstitute our Reserves and meet the general objectives of Sect. Clifford's recommendation?

-- (Gen. Wheeler and Mr. Helms) If Westy and the South Vietnamese turn back the winter-spring offensive, what are the odds on our making 1968 a favorable year of decision; what role would the additional forces Westy has requested play in such an offensive operation?

-- (Sect. Rusk) What negotiating stance should we and the South Vietnamese adopt if we come through in good shape with some forward momentum in May or June?

-- (Sect. Clifford and Gen. Wheeler) What difficulties do you perceive with these recommendations in the Armed Services Committees?

-- (Sect. Fowler) What difficulties do you perceive with the financial committees?

-- (Sect. Rusk) How would we handle the Foreign Affairs and Foreign Relations Committees and, in particular, cope with the anti-Vietnam group in the Senate?

-- (Sects. Rusk and Clifford) How would we present the justification for this program to the Congress and to our people? What consultations do you recommend before we move?

3. Depending on your own judgment at the end of the session, you may wish either to:

-- postpone a decision until you can talk alone with a smaller group, including particularly Secretaries Rusk and Clifford; or

-- direct Secretary Clifford and General Wheeler to undertake the consultations which were yesterday postponed; that is, with Senators Russell and Dirksen; Congressman Rivers; and, via General Goodpaster, with General Eisenhower.

4. Once you have come to a decision, you will need urgent refinement of military, diplomatic, and financial staff work.

W. W. Rostow

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March 4, 1968

NOTES OF THE PRESIDENT'S MEETING
WITH SENIOR FOREIGN POLICY ADVISERS

(The Cabinet Room)

ATTENDING WERE:

The President
The Vice President
Secretary Rusk
Secretary Clifford
General Wheeler
Undersecretary Nitze
CIA Director Helms
General Maxwell Taylor
Secretary Henry Fowler
Mr. Walt Rostow
Mr. George Christian
Mr. Marvin Watson (joined for conclusion)
Mr. Tom Johnson

The meeting began at 5:33 p. m. It ended
at 7:20 p. m.

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Walt Rostow: That is correct.

Clark Clifford: Paul Nitze and I started to work on this Friday night. As you could understand, with the time pressure we placed upon ourselves there still may need to be refinements and adjustments to the program I will discuss.

We have tried to make this document clear and understandable. (Undersecretary Nitze passed out prior to the meeting copies of a "Draft Memorandum for the President" A copy of that document is attached.)

The subject is a very profound one, and I consider it advisable to outline the difficulty we face and the central problem which your advisers see you facing.

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As you know, from time to time, the military leaders in the field ask for additional forces. We have, in the past, met these requests until we are now at the point where we have agreed to supply up to 525,000 men to General Westmoreland.

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2. Should the President not send any more?
3. Should the President approve a figure somewhere in between and send an alternative number?

Your senior advisers have conferred on this matter at very great length. There is a deep-seated concern by your advisers. There is a concern that if we say, yes, and step up with the addition of 205,000 more men that we might continue down the road as we have been without accomplishing our purpose---which is for a viable South Vietnam which can live in peace.

We are not convinced that our present policy will bring us to that objective.

As I said before, we spent hours discussing this matter. For a while, we thought and had the feeling that we understood the strength of the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese. You will remember the rather optimistic reports of General Westmoreland and Ambassador Bunker last year.

Frankly, it came as a shock that the Vietcong-North Vietnamese had the strength of force and skill to mount the Tet offensive---as they did. They struck 34 cities, made strong inroads in Saigon and in Hue. There have been very definite effects felt in the countryside.

At this stage, it is clear that this new request by General Westmoreland brings the President to a clearly defined watershed:

1. Do you continue to go down that same road of "more troops, more guns, more planes, more ships?"

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2. Do you go on killing more Viet Cong and more North Vietnamese and killing more Vietcong and more North Vietnamese?

There are grave doubts that we have made the type of progress we had hoped to have made by this time. As we build up our forces, they build up theirs. We continue to fight at a higher level of intensity.

Even were we to meet this full request of 205,000 men, and the pattern continues as it has, it is likely that by March he (General Westmoreland) may want another 200,000 to 300,000 men with no end in sight.

The country we are trying to save is being subjected to enormous damage. Perhaps the country we are trying to save is relying on the United States too much. When we look ahead, we may find that we may actually be denegating their ability to take over their own country rather than contributing to their ability to do it.

We recommend in this paper that you meet the requirement for only those forces that may be needed to deal with any exigencies of the next 3-4 months. March-April-May could be an important period.

We recommend an immediate decision to deploy to Vietnam an estimated total of 22,000 additional personnel. We would agree to get them to General Westmoreland right away. It would be valuable for the general to know they are coming so he can make his plans accordingly.

This is as far as we are willing to go We would go ahead, however, and call up a sufficient number of men. If later the President decides Westmoreland needs additional reinforcements, you will have men to meet that contingency.

The President: Westmoreland is asking for 200,000 men, and you are recommending 20,000 or so?

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Clark Clifford: The strategic reserves in the United States are deeply depleted. They must be built up. Senator Russell has said this. We do not know what might happen anywhere around the world, but to face any emergency we will need to strengthen the reserve.

Out of this buildup you can meet additional requests from Westmoreland in the event you decide he needs more than the 22,000 later. The first increment will meet his needs for the next three to four months.

Westmoreland must not have realized it, but it would have taken much longer than he had anticipated to provide the men and units he originally requested anyway. We could not meet that schedule.

We suggest that you go ahead and get the manpower ready. If they are not really necessary for Vietnam, they can be added to the Strategic Reserve to strengthen it.

We also feel strongly that there should be a comprehensive study of the strategic guidance to be given General Westmoreland in the future.

We are not sure the present strategy is the right strategy---that of being spread out all over the country with a seek and destroy policy.

We are not convinced that this is the right way, that it is the right long-term course to take. We are not sure under the circumstances which exist that a conventional military victory, as commonly defined, can be had.

After this study is made---if there is no clear resolution in the actions of the next 3-4 months except long drawn-out procedure---we may want to change the strategic guidance given Westmoreland. Perhaps we should not be trying to protect all of the countryside, and instead concentrate on the cities and important areas in the country.

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There will be considerably higher casualties if we follow the Westmoreland plan. It just follows that if we increase our troop commitment by 200,000 men, there will be significantly higher casualties.

We may want to consider using our men as a "shield" behind which the government of South Vietnam could strengthen itself and permit the ARVN to be strengthened.

Under the present situation, there is a good deal of talk about what the Arvn "will do" but when the crunch is on, when the crunch comes, they look to us for more. When they got into the Tet offensive, Thieu's statement wasn't what more they could do but that "it is time for more U.S. troops." There is no easy answer to this.

If we continue with our present policy of adding more troops and increasing our commitment, this policy may lead us into Laos and Cambodia.

The reserve forces in North Vietnam are a cause for concern as well. They have a very substantial population from which to draw. They have no trouble whatever organizing, equipping, and training their forces.

We seem to have a sinkhole. We put in more---they match it. We put in more---they match it.

The South Vietnamese are not doing all they should do.

The Soviets and the Chinese have agreed to keep the North Vietnamese well armed and well supplied.

The Vietcong are now better armed than the ARVN.
They have:

- better rifles
- better training
- more sophisticated weapons (mortars, artillery, rockets)

I see more and more fighting with more and more casualties on the U.S. side and no end in sight to the action.

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I want to give a whole new look at the whole situation. There is strong unanimity on this. If it were possible, we would want to look at the situation without sending more troops to him. But we should send the 22,000---that is, until a new policy decision is reached. And that 22,000---that will be it until that decision is made.

We can no longer rely just on the field commander. He can want troops and want troops and want troops. We must look at the overall impact on us, including the situation here in the United States. We must look at our economic stability, our other problems in the world, our other problems at home; we must consider whether or not this thing is tying us down so that we cannot do some of the other things we should be doing; and finally, we must consider the effects of our actions on the rest of the world---are we setting an example in Vietnam through which other nations would rather not go if they are faced with a similar threat?

It is out of caution and for protection that we recommend these additional forces.

Now the time has come to decide where do we go from here.

I can assure the President that we can reexamine this situation with complete protection to our present position.

We do recommend the following actions:

1. A callup of reserve units and individuals totaling approximately 262,000. (194,000 in units; 68,000 as individuals)
2. An increase in the draft calls
3. Extension of terms of service.

These actions would produce a total increase in strength in the Armed Forces of approximately 511,000 by June 30, 1969.

This proposal includes 31,600 troops for deployment to South Korea. I would oppose that. It also includes a U.S. navy unit.

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If the troops for South Korea and the naval units are disapproved, the figures would be decreased to approximately 242,000 reservists called up and 454,000 total increase in troop strength.

If you do wish to meet the additional troop request, or further demands of Westmoreland you can do it out of this pool of 242,000 .

If you did not, the Strategic Reserve would be strengthened by their addition. This would, in the opinion of the JCS, put the Strategic Reserve "just about right."

You need to have that type of reserve in times such as these.

As part and parcel of policy decisions, it is important to have a very clear understanding with the government of South Vietnam. They should know that your eventual decision about more troops and more use of U. S. support depends to a large part on their attitude.

We should tell the South Vietnamese that the General has asked for 200,000 more troops, but we are giving only 25,000. We should let them know that you are delaying your decision until you know what the GVN will do about:

- removal of the poor unit commanders
- meaningful steps to eliminate corruption
- meeting their own leadership responsibilities
- not only saying they will do something, but meaning it as well.

If they are not, we should know it now.

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I suggest you allow yourself greater degree of latitude and flexibility. There possibly is another plan which can be utilized. There may be another way to avoid more bloodshed to us, possibly by letting go some areas.

We should consider changing our concept from one of protecting real estate to protecting people. We need to see if these people are really going to take care of themselves eventually. I am not sure we can ever find our way out if we continue to shovel men into Vietnam.

We have looked at all your questions. The answers to each of them are included in the context of the document before you tonight.

We say, for example, that this is not the time to negotiate.

We have spent the last three days trying to reach a consensus. As we sat together and cross-fertilized, we have reached a general consensus on this.

Of course, if we had to vote on sending the straight 200,000 men or no men, we would come out all over the lot... we would be split all over the place.

But we wonder if we are really making progress toward our goal under the plan we have been following.

This is the overall approach we would recommend.

The President: Does this change the tour of duty?

General Wheeler: The tour of duty in Vietnam is not changed. We feel this is an essential reason for the high morale. It is the total length of service which will be lengthened.

The President: Does it affect the man with 4 years service the same as the draftee?

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General Wheeler: Yes, sir. It would apply to all types. Of course, there are some men we would not want to extend.

The President: Have we done this before (extend tours) ?

Undersecretary Nitze: Yes, sir. At least twice. At one time, the Secretary of the Navy had the authority to do this. I did it for a period during Vietnam. The Congress took this authority away last year to put it on an equal basis with the other services.

General Wheeler: We did it at the same time of the Berlin airlift. Also during the Cuban missile crisis, I believe.

Secretary Rusk: Mr. President, without a doubt, this will be one of the most serious decisions you will have made since becoming President. This has implications for all of our society.

First, on the review of strategic guidance: we want the Vietnamese to do their full share and be able to survive when we leave. This was one of the things that saved us in Korea. The question is whether substantial additional troops would eventually increase or decrease South Vietnamese strength.

We may very well find that there are equipment factors that would create competition among our new U.S. forces being sent out to Vietnam and the South Vietnamese. Many of us would like to see the ARN equipped better and supplied with the M-16 rifles.

We must also consider what would happen to our NATO troop policies. To reduce NATO troops is a serious matter indeed.

We have also got to think of what this troop increase would mean in terms of increased taxes, the balance of payments picture, inflation, gold, and the general economic picture.

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We should study moving away from the geographic approach of Vietnam strategy to a demographic approach.

On the negotiation front, I wish we had a formula to bring about a peaceful settlement soon. We do not. The North Vietnamese are pressing against Laos and Thailand. The Chinese are leaning against Burma and Cambodia.

During the day we had two additional comebacks on two probes which we made. The Shah of Iran saw Hanoi's representative. The Hanoi representative pressed the Shah to get us to accept some of their conditions---those Hanoi had laid down. He said he wanted to see the Shah again.

The Rumanian was in again. I asked him if after the winter-spring offensive the Hanoi government would take a different position. He said he thought they were giving some thought to it.

But the negotiation track is quite bleak at the current time.

I think we should make public some of our peace efforts. Clark Clifford has outlined well the problems. Appendix G and H will show the divisive element we must face if we move forward with this decision.

The President: Why not an extension of enlistments at the same time of the callup of reserves? Why can't we have the callup now, with the extension of enlistments later if needed?

General Wheeler: The extension is the best way to quickly build up the Strategic Reserve. We need men with leadership and experience to train new men and to expand and improve our replacements.

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Nitze: We could say that no man would be extended for more than a certain period of time.

W heeler: On that point (whether Congress will go for an extension of enlistments) you have a better feel than I.

President: Russell says you must call up reserves before extending enlistments.

Wheeler: The callup must be phased anyway. When you announce callup, you should announce the dates of the callup of the units.

I talked to the JCS today. General Chapman says he needs a certain number of Marine Reserves to fill out the 4th Marine Wing.

Clifford: I suggest a package approach including:

- the callup of reserves
- extension of enlistments
- callup of individuals

By time Congress took action on the extension, we would be calling men up anyway. If we did not get extensions we would be along with the regular unit callup anyway.

President : I don't question the need for a callup. How many men can you get by voluntary extensions.

Nitze: Very few. We got only 900 last time.

President: What about incentives?

Wheeler: We have some very good incentives.

President: How much of an increase in draft calls?

Nitze: About an increase of 150,000 men in 6 months. The draft call is up to 48,000. They have been running 30,000. The increase would have them running about 45,000.

President: How about men who haven't served?

Wheeler: They are not as well trained. We need men with experience.

In FY 68, 341,000 men are to be inducted. Need an additional 100,000 this year.

Rusk: What is annual increment of inductees?

Wheeler: We have enormous pool of men available.

President: How many in Project 100,000?

Nitze: 60,000 approximately. In Phase I, quota was 40,000. There were 49,000 volunteered. In Phase II, there is a quota of 100,000. In first three months, 31,000 have volunteered. That is far above quota for that period.

Fowler: We would need an entirely new fiscal program to offset expenditures dollar for dollar. I would forecast an increase in expenditures of \$2.5 billion in fiscal 68 and \$10 billion in fiscal 69. There would be an adverse balance of payments impact of \$500 million.

The adoption of this program would require a new fiscal program. These things are necessary:

---a new fiscal package

---a new mutual security package (separating all project assistance for South Vietnam, Thailand, and Korea from the current foreign aid arrangement)

---agreement on reserve management

---Increase in the tax proposal so that we could offset expenditures

---Cut low priority civilian programs (A \$2-\$3 billion cut in program outlays would be required).

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An increase in the force level by 500,000 men would put pressure on manpower and employment. The cream of the labor force, men twenty years of age or older, already is way down low in unemployment.

We will have some area and skill shortages. This will have its pluses and its minuses. We could then begin to focus out training and manpower development programs on a specific area or specific skill. We could, by this, minimize the manpower shortages.

We would have to have additional procurement. There would need to be an assessment of materiel and supply program. Also judgments must be made on our economic and stabilization policies. I would ask Okum, Martin, Zwick and I to determine if---

---standby credit controls should be used

---we should have authority to deal with flareups in the wage-price field.

Dick Helms: I feel that the study of the last 3-4 days has shown that we must replenish our Strategic Reserve. If you look at conditions throughout the world, you can easily see that we need it.

Rusk: I would go to Congress for specific actions not for a statement of policy such as the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. We do not want a general declaration.

President: In the Senate we face a real problem. Anything that requires any authority may result in a filibuster.

Wheeler: If we could provide Westy with the troops he wants I would recommend they be sent. They cannot be provided. This (the 22,000) is what we can do by 15 June.

I find nothing wrong with going along with this track. I recommend these additional forces: 4 battalions of infantry; 3 tactical fighter squadrons; an additional 6 tactical fighter squadrons (2 by 1 April; 3 by 1 May; 1 by 1 June); 1 Marine RLT of the 4th Marine Division; and 1 Battalion of Seabees (700 men).

This is all we can do by 15 June.

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With the callup of the reserves, you still can meet Westmoreland's request by 1 September and 1 December---but not by May 1.

President: Why Seabees?

Wheeler: We need to expand that unit of personnel.

Walt Rostow: There are two matters that need to be looked into in this study:

1. The question of North Vietnamese Reserves. There are two schools of thought on this. Some believe they can put additional men into battle easily, and match our forces. Some think they are limited.

2. I think we should cast aside the generalities about military solution vs. diplomatic solution; or population strategy vs. real estate protection.

I agree we must build up the ARVN and the GVN. They are the reason we are there. Ought to bring them along on the Southern solution. That is, we need to talk candidly with them and develop a frank dialogue about the matters between us.

We need to look for a fresh summary of the reasons for mining Haiphong. There may be additional military steps to resolve the matter sooner.

The Russians really have not had difficult choices. We should look at a course of harder as well as softer policy.

Nitze: I differ with Walt on that. We need to build up the Arvn and the government. The real impact depends on whether the ARVN can pick themselves up. We must use the ARVN more effectively.

It is clear that our strategic reserves are inadequate. We must rebuild them.

Wheeler: Prior to Vietnam, the Strategic Reserves had 12 divisions (9 Army and 3 Marines).

Now they have 4 2/3 Army (none of which are deployable) and 1 1/9 Marines (not deployable).

Nitze: We must get into negotiations some time soon. These fellows are not necessarily the key (the contacts such as the Rumanian or the Shah).

We must make up our own minds when we want to cease the bombings and see what happens.

We have to look at what we can do to get into negotiations. We must choose our own time. We should do this no later than May or June.

Rusk: We could stop the bombing during the rainy period in the North.

President: Really "get on your horses" on that.

Vice President: I have no comment on anything. I really just have been learning tonight.

General Taylor: We are all for this recommendation tonight---but all for different reasons. I frankly was startled to learn that we can't send more than 22,000 men.

I also want to know if this is a year of despair or a year of opportunity. I think it is the latter.

Westy may get into trouble between now and June. He could lose a lot of politically valuable terrain.

We should bear this in mind. The first three pages of the document. I agree with that.

The tab on new Strategic Guidance. I agree we should review this, but we may not be able to reduce the blood requirement, the troop requirement, and the other necessities.

Let's not delude ourselves about the ARVN. They will try--they

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will give us the right answers---but don't count on them to do too much in a short period of time.

President: Have you told Westmoreland you would only send this number and we could give no more by June 1?

Wheeler: No, I will tell him after this meeting.

President: Tell him to forget the 100,000. Tell him 22,000 is all we can give at the moment.

Rusk: I see new fighting has begun.

Wheeler: They are planning to crank up a new offensive. I told Westy that combined operations would draw the Arvn out.

President: If the ARVN are not equipped as well as the Vietcong, isn't that a sad commentary on us?

Nitze: It may be possible to supply all ARVN with M-16s, and grenade launchers and machine guns. We have armed personnel carriers on the way out to Westmoreland now.

Wheeler: We are also shipping tanks and choppers.

President: Have we gotten through the engine bottleneck on the choppers?

Nitze: No

President: Let's do everything we can on choppers. Otherwsie, I am going to bring that over here to handle. Get them working six day weeks, if necessary.

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4 March 1968

DRAFT MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

General Westmoreland has requested an additional 205,000 troops (beyond the 525,000 personnel now authorized). He asks for the deployment in three packages, by May 1, September 1 and December 31.

General Wheeler believes we should prepare ourselves to meet the request for an additional 205,000 personnel and should act to increase and improve our strategic reserve in the United States. An initial staff examination of requirements indicates that to achieve both will require:

- a. A call-up of reserve units and individuals totaling approximately 262,000 (194,000 in units, 68,000 as individuals).
- b. Increased draft calls.
- c. Extension of terms of service. These actions would produce a total increase in end strength in the Armed Forces of approximately 511,000 by June 30, 1969. (The staff examination referred to above included spaces to add 31,500 troops in South Korea and a US naval proposal to add two cruisers and fifteen destroyers to the naval forces in Southeast Asia. If these proposals are disapproved in their entirety, the figures above will be decreased to approximately 242,000 and 454,000 respectively.)

A build-up of roughly these dimensions would enable us to meet the Westmoreland request and, in any event, would reconstitute the strategic reserve in the United States.

We recommend:

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Authority: DOD Directive 5200.20
By J NARA Date 2-19-02

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1. An immediate decision to deploy to Vietnam an estimated total of 22,000 additional personnel (approximately 60% of which would be combat). An immediate decision to deploy the three tactical fighter squadrons deferred from Program 5 (about 1,000 men). This would be over and above the four battalions (about 3700 men) already planned for deployment in April which in themselves would bring us slightly above the 525,000 authorized level. The argument for this immediate action, and detailed schedules of availability is contained in Tab A.

2. Either through Ambassador Bunker or through an early visit by Secretary Clifford, a highly forceful approach to the GVN (Thieu and Ky) to get certain key commitments for improvement, tied to our own increased effort and to increased US support for the ARVN. Details are in Tab B.

3. Early approval of a Reserve call-up and an increased end strength adequate to meet the balance of the Westmoreland request and to restore a strategic reserve in the United States, adequate for possible contingencies world-wide. Supporting discussion and details are in Tab C.

4. Reservation of the decision to meet the Westmoreland request in full. While we would be putting ourselves in a position to make these additional deployments, the future decision to do so would be contingent upon:

- a. Reexamination on a week-by-week basis of the desirability of further deployments as the situation develops;
- b. Improved political performance by the GVN and increased

contribution in effective military action by the ARVN;

c. The results of a study in depth, to be initiated immediately, of possible new political and strategic guidance for the conduct of US operations in South Vietnam, and of our Vietnamese policy in the context of our world-wide politico-military strategy. Supporting discussion is in Tab D.

5. No new peace initiative on Vietnam. Re-statement of our terms for peace and certain limited diplomatic actions to dramatize Laos and to focus attention on the total threat to Southeast Asia. Details in Tab E.

6. A general decision on bombing policy, not excluding future change, but adequate to form a basis for discussion with the Congress on this key aspect. Here your advisers are divided:

a. General Wheeler and others would advocate a substantial extension of targets and authority in and near Hanoi and Haiphong, mining of Haiphong, and naval gunfire up to a Chinese Buffer Zone;

b. Others would advocate a seasonal step-up through the spring, but without these added elements.

The opposing arguments are in Tab F.

* * * * *

In proposing this course of action, we recognize that there are certain difficulties and negative factors, outlined in Tab G. Additional problems we can anticipate in US public opinion are at Tab H. Nevertheless, we believe that this course of action, in its essential outline at least, is urgently required to meet the immediate situation in Vietnam as well as wider possible contingencies there and elsewhere.

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MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

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Authority NLJ 83-24

By pn is NARA, Date 3-1-91

Meeting with the President
Monday, March 4, 1968, 5:30 P.M.

AGENDA

1. Presentation of report by Sect. Clifford and explanation by him of its substance.
2. General comments.

You may wish to go around the table and ask for observations by Sect. Rusk, Sect. Fowler, Gen. Wheeler, and others.

Key questions: You may then wish to ask the following questions:

-- (Gen. Wheeler) What is the likelihood of Gen. Westmoreland finding himself in a desperate military situation in the course of the next three months?

-- (Gen. Wheeler) Are there any measures that we might take at such a time to assist him if such a situation could arise?

-- (Gen. Wheeler) Have we contingency plans prepared for such an occasion? What particular forces are you recommending that we dispatch immediately, and in what ways might they help Gen. Westmoreland in the next three months?

-- (Sect. Rusk) How soon could we formulate what we want from the South Vietnamese and get an assessment from Bunker and Westmoreland as to the likelihood of their performance?

-- (Gen. Wheeler) Is there a lower level at which we could reconstitute our Reserves and meet the general objectives of Sect. Clifford's recommendation?

-- (Gen. Wheeler and Mr. Helms) If Westy and the South Vietnamese turn back the winter-spring offensive, what are the odds on our making 1968 a favorable year of decision; what role would the additional forces Westy has requested play in such an offensive operation?

-- (Sect. Rusk) What negotiating stance should we and the South Vietnamese adopt if we come through in good shape with some forward momentum in May or June?

-- (Sect. Clifford and Gen. Wheeler) What difficulties do you perceive with these recommendations in the Armed Services Committees?

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-- (Sect. Fowler) What difficulties do you perceive with the financial committees?

-- (Sect. Rusk) How would we handle the Foreign Affairs and Foreign Relations Committees and, in particular, cope with the anti-Vietnam group in the Senate?

-- (Sects. Rusk and Clifford) How would we present the justification for this program to the Congress and to our people? What consultations do you recommend before we move?

3. Depending on your own judgment at the end of the session, you may wish either to:

-- postpone a decision until you can talk alone with a smaller group, including particularly Secretaries Rusk and Clifford; or

-- direct Secretary Clifford and General Wheeler to undertake the consultations which were yesterday postponed; that is, with Senators Russell and Dirksen; Congressman Rivers; and, via General Goodpaster, with General Eisenhower.

4. Once you have come to a decision, you will need urgent refinement of military, diplomatic, and financial staff work.

W. W. Rostow

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4 March 1968

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By jc NARA Doc 2-19-02

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The opposing arguments are in Tab F.

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In proposing this course of action, we recognize that there are certain difficulties and negative factors, outlined in Tab G. Additional problems we can anticipate in US public opinion are at Tab H. Nevertheless, we believe that this course of action, in its essential outline at least, is urgently required to meet the immediate situation in Vietnam as well as wider possible contingencies there and elsewhere.