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NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20506

November 8, 1968

To: Walt Rostow

From: Robert N. Ginsburgh 7

Attached is my nine-volume historical project on the March 31st speech.

Volume 1 contains a preface and the summary account.

Here are the key questions which need to be answered to flesh out the account:

1. On February 11, the President was thinking of sending Vance to visit Saigon. That evening, Wheeler informed Westmoreland that he might be visiting Westmoreland in a few days. On the 13th, Vance was still under consideration.

- Was the thought that both Wheeler and Vance would go to Saigon?
- At what point was General Taylor being considered an emissary?
- When did the President decide that Vance would not go? the 13th? why?

2. On February 17, the President urgently wished to receive recommendations from Rusk and Clifford for a program for the most effective use of airpower against North Vietnam.

- What dispelled the President's sense of urgency?

3. What were the reasons for the President's being initially upset by General Wheeler's troop recommendations? Unexpected size of the requirements? Manner of presentation? Defense opposition? Leaks?

4. On February 28, General Wheeler recommended the deployment of 205,000 men to Vietnam. This would have required a call-up of even more men. When the Clifford Committee reported on March 4, these figures were still being considered, although the committee recommended that the decision for the full amount be deferred. On Friday, March 15, Clifford presented a package for a total call-up of 85,000 (later variously recalculated as 87,000 and 96,000).

- What specific decisions did the President make on March 4 or what guidance did he give?
- What happened between March 4 and 15?
- What was the nature of the troop discussions at the White House on March 4, 5, 12, and 15?

5. By March 28, the deployment package of 30-50,000 was reduced to 13,500 support forces and the call-up was limited to 48,500.

- When were these decisions made? Why?
- What was the nature of the troop discussions at the White House on March 19?

6. Was the President already thinking of a new negotiating initiative when he received McPherson's proposal for a partial bombing cessation?

7. What was the judgment of the Advisory Group meeting on the 26th on the issues of troops, strategy, and negotiations? What influence did they have on the President?

8. How long before March 28 did the President decide on a partial bombing cessation? Why?

9. The President's personal history of what led up to the renunciation?

10. Were there significant Congressional consultations which impacted on these decisions?

The March 31st Speech

PREFACE

This project traces the events between the 1968 TET attacks and the President's speech on March 31st in which he announced the partial cessation of the bombing of North Vietnam and his decision not to seek re-election.

VOLUME 1 contains a summary account of these events.

VOLUMES 2, 3, and 4 contain the significant memos and messages which were either sent to the President or which provided general background for information given to him.

VOLUME 5 consists of

- White House Situation Room reports, and
- CIA situation memoranda.

VOLUME 6 contains

- General Westmoreland's daily reports on the situation at Khe Sanh and in northern I Corps, and
- Ambassador Bunker's weekly reports to the President.

VOLUME 7 contains

- Clifford Committee Report to the President of March 4, preliminary and final drafts and associated papers;
- Walt Rostow's agenda notes for Presidential meetings; and
- Papers for the Advisory Group Meeting, March 25-26.

VOLUME 8 contains

- Clifford Committee working papers;
- Excerpts from the Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents;
- Memoranda for the President from General Taylor; and
- Memoranda on public affairs.

VOLUME 9 consists of records of White House Press Conferences.

On Sunday evening the 31st of March 1968, President Johnson :

- announced a de-escalation of the bombing of North Vietnam (later it was officially revealed that attacks were limited to South of 20 degrees; shortly afterwards operations were restricted to south of 19 degrees, but this was never officially admitted).

- reaffirmed the San Antonio formula.

- called on the UK and the USSR to do all they could to move toward peace.

- announced U. S. willingness to send its representatives to any forum at any time.

- designated Averell Harriman as his personal representative for such talks (with Llewellyn Thompson as consultant).

- discussed South Vietnamese accomplishments, while calling for further efforts on their part.

- stated that the U. S. would accelerate the re-equipment of South Vietnam's armed forces.

- announced that the U. S. was preparing to send 13,500 support troops to Vietnam during the next five months in addition to the 11,000 combat troops previously deployed on an emergency basis.

- estimated that these actions would require additional expenditures of \$2.5 billion in the current fiscal year and \$2.6 billion in the following fiscal year.

- renewed his request for a tax bill.
- reaffirmed the pledge of the Manila Communique on withdrawal of troops.
- reaffirmed the Johns Hopkins speech offer to North Vietnam to participate in the economic development of Southeast Asia.
- announced that he would not seek and would not accept renomination for the Presidency.

This research paper summarizes the events which led up to this historic announcement beginning with the enemy's TET attacks at the end of January.

We now know that the origin of the TET attacks goes back to the summer of 1967 when the enemy judged that he was losing the war of attrition as it was being conducted. At that time, General Giap decided that before peace talks could be held, it would be necessary to achieve a military advantage over the allies.

On the basis of prisoner of war reports and captured documents, we became aware about September 1967 that the enemy planned a massive winter-spring offensive.

That is why the President accelerated the delivery to Vietnam by Christmas of 1967, 102 of the 106 maneuver battalions which had been promised to General Westmoreland by June of 1968.

That is why the President warned the Australian Cabinet and ~~then the other~~ fighting allies at Canberra that we must expect "~~canikaze~~^{kamikaze} tactics!" this winter.

In the period between November and the end of January 1968, the enemy brought two additional North Vietnamese divisions into South Vietnam. In early December, we sensed that a major threat to Khe Sanh was developing and that the North Vietnamese were viewing the Khe Sanh as a potential Dien Bien Phu.

This had led the President to question whether we ought to defend Khe Sanh. On the 12th of January, General Westmoreland informed General Wheeler that the Khe Sanh position was important and should be defended.

As TET (Lunar New Year) approached, General Westmoreland sensed that a big blow was coming at TET. He agreed, in the first place, only to a 36-hour TET truce as opposed to the seven days the Viet Cong had announced.

On the 22nd of January, General Westmoreland informed Washington that the expected enemy offensive in northern I Corps had in fact begun. On the 20th and 21st of January a two-week general lull in country-wide activity was interrupted by assaults on the Marine position north of Khe Sanh as well as other attacks in northern I Corps.

General Westmoreland stated: "I believe the enemy will attempt a country-wide show of strength just prior to TET, with Khe Sanh being the main event. In II Corps, he will probably attack around Pleuku and Kontum cities, and I expect attacks on the Special Forces camps at Dak Seang, Duc Co, and Dak To. In III and IV Corps, province towns are likely targets for renewed attacks by fire. Terrorism will probably increase in and around Saigon."

In a separate message on the same day, he noted that: "The current winter-spring campaign is unusual in its urgency and intensity. The bulk of our evidence suggests that the enemy is conducting a short-term surge effort, possibly designed to improve his chances of gaining his ends through political means, perhaps through negotiations leading to some form of coalition government." (Negotiations actually began in May, and the enemy's surge effort came to an end in early September with the defeat of his third offensive.)

On January 24th, General Westmoreland asked for permission to cancel the TET truce completely and to continue bombing in the southern part of North Vietnam during TET. He also brought his divisions closer to Saigon, sensing an attack there.

On January 28th, General Westmoreland informed Washington that "there are indications that the enemy may not cease military operations during TET. In fact, he is now well into his announced TET standdown period with no discernible decrease in significant activity in the northern two corps areas."

At this point, the President again expressed to General Wheeler his concern about Khe Sanh. - In a telephone call with General Wheeler, General Westmoreland reaffirmed his view that we could and should hold Khe Sanh. When General Wheeler informed the other Chiefs of Westmoreland's view and Wheeler's agreement with this evaluation, the other Chiefs asked that the President be informed that the JCS concurred with Westmoreland's

assessment and that they recommended that we maintain our position at Khe Sanh.

Allied observance of the truce began at 6 p. m. (5 a. m. EST) on the 29th of January. Shortly after midnight, the enemy attacked the city of Danang and military installations in the vicinity. Other major attacks were launched against Kontum, Pleiku, Nha Trang, Ban Me Thuot, and Ton Canh with lesser attacks on Qui Nhon and Tuy Hoa. For some reason -- perhaps poor coordination -- enemy activity in III and IV Corps was comparatively light during the 30th. By the end of the day, General Westmoreland reported at least 750 enemy dead and 74 friendly killed.

In Washington, the planned agenda for Tuesday lunch, the 30th, was to concentrate on the Korean crisis stemming from enemy seizure of the PUEBLO, plus reports on peace feelers in Vietnam. As a result of the first day of the TET attack, the conversation broadened to include discussion of (1) possible enemy MIG activity south of 20 degrees and use of TALOS against them, (2) patrols north of the provisional military demarcation line in Vietnam, (3) a feint against the North Vietnam panhandle, and (4) the possible relationship between the PUEBLO seizure and events in Vietnam.

On the 31st, attacks were concentrated primarily in III and IV Corps, with a few of the previous day's attacks continuing. Most dramatic were attacks on the Saigon airfields and Saigon itself, including an attack against the U. S. Embassy. The emphasis of the attacks was on heavy populated

areas and friendly air bases. In addition to the major cities of Saigon, Hue, and Danang, 28 of the provincial capitals were hit.

At the end of the day, General Westmoreland reported that the enemy had achieved no significant military results. He had lost at least 3,000 killed in two days of fighting while friendly deaths were reported at less (Figures were revised later in the day to 4,320, 421, and 189.) than 300, including an estimated 100 Americans./ He estimated that the enemy could continue similar attacks for at least another day or two.

(Later it turned out that the enemy offensive had in fact peaked during these first two days of fighting.)

After receiving this report, the President in mid-afternoon asked Mr. Rostow to get more detailed information from General Westmoreland on casualties, enemy capacity to sustain the present campaign, the relationship between the North Vietnamese and North Korean actions, whether there was a military impasse in South Vietnam, whether the enemy was holding any towns, and what political and psychological problems Ambassador Bunker and General Westmoreland foresaw.

Using the classified telephone, General Westmoreland gave his answers to General Ginsburgh in the White House Situation Room. These answers were passed on to Mr. Rostow in the "Tuesday Luncheon" meeting which had begun at 5:50 p. m.

Meanwhile, at an 8:30 meeting that morning the President had indicated that by 5 p. m. he wanted to receive preliminary recommendations on how

the United States should respond to the Vietnam and Korean crises. Final recommendations were to be made the next day after we had seen whether there were any results from a peace initiative which the Rumanians had been mounting with Hanoi.

On the 31st, the President was apparently inclined toward sending a message to Congress on Friday, the 2nd. Among the measures to be considered for inclusion in such a message were:

- Presidential authority to extend military tours of duty and to call up individual Reservists.
- An extra \$200 million in military aid (\$100 for South Korea).
- Lifting of the gold cover.
- Prompt passage of the tax bill.
- Allocation of funds for the Price Stabilization Board.
- Freeing of exchange stabilization fund to defend the dollar.
- Trade and tourist legislation.
- Voluntary wage restraints.

Most of these issues came to be handled separately, but as far as Vietnam was concerned, the President's March 31 speech could be traced back to the ideas first considered on January 31st.

On the 1st of February, General Westmoreland described the TET offensive as a Pyrrhic victory. He noted, however, that the enemy was capable at any time of attacking in the Khe Sanh-DMZ area with up to

four divisions. He expected the enemy to begin a major offensive at any time with the Khe Sanh combat base as his major objective. The President reviewed the military situation with the JCS, General Ridgway, and General Taylor -- who generally concurred with General Westmoreland's assessment.

These evaluations provided the basis for the President's assessment of the situation which he gave at a press conference on Friday, February 2nd. He pointed out:

"We have known for several months, now, that the Communists planned a massive winter-spring offensive. We have detailed information on Ho Chi Minh's order governing that offensive. Part of it is called a general uprising.

"We know the object was to overthrow the constitutional government in Saigon and to create a situation in which we and the Vietnamese would be willing to accept the Communist-dominated coalition government.

"Another part of that offensive was planned as a massive attack across the frontiers of South Vietnam by North Vietnamese units. We have already seen the general uprising.

"General Westmoreland's headquarters report the Communists appear to have lost over 10,000 men killed and some 2,300 detained. The United States has lost 249 men killed. The Vietnamese, who had to carry the brunt of the fighting in the cities, lost 553 killed as of my most recent report from the Westmoreland headquarters.

"There were also a number of attacks on United States airfields throughout the country. We have confirmed the loss of 15 fixed-wing aircraft and 23 helicopters were destroyed. A good many more were damaged but will be returned to service.

"This is a small proportion of our aircraft and helicopters available in that area. Secretary McNamara, General Westmoreland, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff do not think that our military operations will be materially affected.

"The biggest fact is that the stated purposes of the general uprising have failed. Communist leaders counted on popular support in the cities for their effort. They found little or none. On the other hand, there have been civilian casualties and disruption of public services. Just before I came into the room, I read a long cable from Ambassador Bunker which described the vigor with which the Vietnamese Government and our own people are working together to deal with the problems of restoring civilian services and order in all of the cities.

"In the meanwhile, we may at this very moment be on the eve of a major enemy offensive in the area of Khesanh and generally around the Demilitarized Zone.

"We have known for some time that this offensive was planned by the enemy. Over recent weeks I have been in close touch with General Westmoreland, and in recent days in very close touch with all of our Joint Chiefs of Staff to make sure that every single thing that General Westmoreland believed that he needed at this time was available to him, and that our Joint Chiefs believe that his strategy was sound, his men were sure, and they were amply supplied.

"I am confident in the light of the information given to me that our men and the South Vietnamese will be giving a good account of themselves."

That evening the President was furnished the results of a prisoner of war interrogation, which confirmed from the enemy point of view that the TET attacks had been a "go for broke" effort which had failed.

Nevertheless, fighting was still continuing. As far as the large cities were concerned, it was limited to Hue, Pleiku, ^aDa Lat, Phan That and parts of Saigon. Against this background, the President met with the Tuesday Lunch Group for a Saturday luncheon. The meeting focused not on Vietnam but on the Korean situation and possible moves to strengthen our basic world-wide military posture.

Meanwhile, the President had been alerted to expect an attack on Khe Sanh, beginning as early as midday Friday. By Sunday midday when the attacks had not yet begun, the President was informed that our massive B-52 and tactical air attacks might well have upset the enemy's timing. Nevertheless, on the basis of intelligence reports, we still expected an attack any time within the next three days.

By late afternoon, the President received word that Khe Sanh was under mortar attack and that a ground attack had been launched against one of the

outlying defensive positions (Hill 861). The President followed the situation closely during the course of the next few hours and by late evening was informed that the attack had apparently been repulsed.

On Sunday and Monday, the President received assessments of the situation from Ambassador Bunker, and Generals Westmoreland and Abrams. At this point, the enemy's killed in action had mounted to more than 20,000 with South Vietnamese deaths at about 1,000 and U. S. , 500.

General Westmoreland stated:

"From a realistic point of view, we must accept the fact that the enemy has dealt the GVN a severe blow. He has brought the war to the towns and the cities and has inflicted damage and casualties on the population. . . . A tremendous challenge has been posed to the GVN to restore stability and to aid the people who have suffered. "

On the other hand, he pointed out:

"Militarily, the enemy has failed in his objectives and has not been able to sustain his attacks. "

As a result, Walt Rostow noted to the President that if our side did its job well, "the net effect could be a shortening of the war. "

It had become obvious, however, that the public's perception varied greatly from that of the President and his key advisors. The President urged his people in Saigon and Washington to get out the word. They failed. Not until the summer months, after the bombing restriction, the beginning of talks in Paris, the failure of the enemy's May offensive, and the abortion of his June offensive did the public (and segments of officialdom) gain what had been the President's initial perspective of the TET attacks.

For the Tuesday Lunch meeting on the 6th of February, the Vietnam discussion concerned the questions of bombing additional targets in North Vietnam. That afternoon, Khe Sanh and the Lang Vei Special Forces Camp a few miles to the west came under attack. By the next day, Lang Vei had been evacuated.

At this point, a review of the situation was in order. The enemy was pressing on toward Khe Sanh. Enemy remnants were still in Saigon. Part of Hue was still occupied by the enemy. A second wave of attacks on the cities was anticipated. General Westmoreland had had to commit some of his reserves. On Wednesday, the 7th, Rostow raised with the President the possibility of flying the 82nd Airborne Division to Vietnam, extension of enlistments, and calling up the reserves.

On Friday morning, the 9th, the President met with his regular foreign policy advisors, plus the JCS, to review the situation in Vietnam and Korea. During the course of the day, General Westmoreland informed General Wheeler that he "would welcome reinforcements at any time they could be made available." He explained how he would plan to employ the 82nd Airborne Division and half of a Marine division -- if made available. He stated he "would much prefer a bird in the hand than two in the bush, but would like the birds to be deployed to the I Corps area" rather than II or III Corps. He thought a six-month loan of these units might be sufficient.

Sunday afternoon, February 11th, the President met with the Tuesday Lunch Group, plus Clark Clifford and General Taylor, to consider a response

to General Westmoreland's message. Other Vietnam issues considered were: increasing supply levels at Khe Sanh, the sending of an emissary to Saigon (perhaps Vance after finishing his mission to Korea), possible enemy initiatives, military initiatives we might undertake, and a Presidential speech.

It was decided that the same group would meet late the following afternoon and that, in the meantime, General Wheeler would get a clarification from General Westmoreland on the troop question. General Wheeler informed Westmoreland that at the meeting his message had been interpreted as saying that he could use the troops but not expressing a firm demand, and that he did not fear defeat if he were not reinforced. General Wheeler asked his views on a strategy which would (1) clear the cities, (2) give away no territory but avoid combat in terrain and weather favoring the enemy, and (3) use U. S. troops in the delta as his reserve, leaving the IV Corps operations to the ARVN. He added that he might be visiting Saigon in a few days.

Before he received this message, Westmoreland had already sent a message which answered the questions about reinforcements. It arrived Monday morning. It stated that his posture was marginal and that he desperately needed reinforcements. He noted that he had 500,000 of the 525,000 U. S. troop level that had been planned for 1969. He stated that he needed the 525,000 now. He urged the immediate deployment of a Marine regiment package and a brigade of the 82nd Airborne with the balance of the two divisions to follow later.

He stressed that he faced "a situation of great opportunity as well as heightened risk," but time was "of the essence." He stated: "I do not see how the enemy can long sustain the heavy losses which his new strategy is enabling us to inflict on him. Therefore, adequate reinforcements should permit me not only to contain his I Corps offensive but also to capitalize on his losses by seizing the initiative in other areas. Exploiting this opportunity could materially shorten the war." In later telephone call with General Wheeler, he indicated how he would prefer to use the troops made available to him.

These views were considered at the Monday afternoon meeting along with instructions for Mr. Vance's proposed trip to Saigon and a Presidential speech.

While the meeting was in progress, orders were issued to alert an airborne brigade and three Marine battalions for aerial movement to South Vietnam. Shortly after 9 p. m., the airborne brigade was directed to begin movement by air not later than 6 p. m. on the 14th. An hour later, movement of the Marine units was directed. (This had involved the substitution of a Marine battalion in Hawaii for the Marine battalion earlier alerted on the West Coast.)

Other actions resulting from the meeting included: speed-up in the clearing of key routes in northern I Corps, request to South Korea to speed up the sending of an additional division to South Vietnam, attempt to speed up Thai deployments, speed-up shipments of helicopter replacements,

investigate possibility of sending additional C-130s to Vietnam, and pressure on South Vietnam to draft 18 and 19 year olds, and a look at revising command relations.

Meanwhile earlier in the day authority had been granted to exceed temporarily the authorized 1,200 B-52 sorties per month in order to support Khe Sanh/DMZ requirements.

At lunch the next day, Tuesday, the 13th, the major item for discussion was a Reserve call-up and Congressional actions: which units, authority to be sought from Congress, budget consequences, public presentation, and rationale.

Various options considered were:

- Deter additional reinforcements and a Reserve call-up until further information was available on Westmoreland's additional requirements.

- Call-up 40,000 now with the possibility of more later.

- Ask Congress for authority for additional personnel actions required.

- Requesting immediately or deferring supplemental appropriations.

During the meeting, the President posed a series of nine questions on a Reserve call-up which he wished answers for.

The President decided that before he called up the Reserves or asked Congress for additional authorities, he wanted an on-the-spot report from Vietnam. Earlier he had been thinking of the possibility of sending Mr. Vance and perhaps General Taylor to Saigon. Now on February 13th, he decided it should be General Wheeler, and he wanted him to get underway as soon as possible.

Senator Fulbright, however, had summoned Secretary McNamara to testify before the Foreign Relations Committee on Wednesday, February 21st, on the Tonkin Gulf hearings. McNamara needed General Wheeler to back him up in the hearings so that Wheeler was unable to leave for Saigon until a week later -- after the hearings on the 21st.

Other Vietnam items of concern to the President at this point were: an unsuccessful conclusion to the Rumanian peace feeler to Hanoi, U Thant's meeting with an NLF representative in Paris, pre-emption by Secretary Rusk of an anticipated public statement by U Thant, General Taylor's concern as to whether we should continue to hold Khe Sanh, a wobbly position in Quang Tri City, intelligence on further attacks on Khe Sanh and a new round of attacks on the cities, improvement of ARVN, a new strategy proposal by Ambassador Lodge, various

reports that enemy was not interested in any negotiations, and an announcement by the Italian Foreign Ministry of an Italian peace initiative.

On the night of February 15, the President was informed that on the basis of very tenuous evidence there was a possibility that a final assault might never take place. Enemy unit movements looked as though the threat to Khe Sanh might be diminishing and that he might have designs on Hue. As it turned out, the estimate eventually turned out to be correct -- but premature.

The weekend of the 17th and 18th the President visited the airborne and Marine units which had begun their deployment to Vietnam. He also stopped in to see General Eisenhower in Palm Springs.

During the course of the weekend, the enemy launched his anticipated second wave of attacks against the cities. Although widespread, the attacks concentrated on shelling rather than ground attacks and the intensity was much lower than the Tet attacks. At each of the President's stops he was informed of the latest developments in the situation.

Late Saturday night, he emphasized that he wanted to receive as quickly as possible recommendations from Rusk, Clifford and Wheeler on a program for the most effective use of airpower against North Vietnam.

During the period while he was waiting for the Wheeler mission to be launched, the President gave the appearance of wanting to get on with the war as quickly as possible by increasing attacks not only against North Vietnam but also by getting to South Vietnam additional reinforcements as quickly as possible.

At lunch, Tuesday, the 20th, Mr. Helms and General Wheeler presented the latest situation reports on Vietnam, and the President reviewed his instructions to General Wheeler for his trip to Vietnam which was to begin the next evening.

Meanwhile, staff planning was to proceed in Washington so that no time would be lost after General Wheeler had returned and presented his recommendations.

At the meeting on the 13th, Secretary McNamara had proposed two Reserve call-up options -- of 40,000 and 130,000 -- before the Joint Chiefs of Staff had completed their review. The Joint Chiefs of Staff shortly recommended an immediate call-up of 46,300 and that 137,000 additional Reservists (for a possible total of 183,000) be brought to a high state of readiness for possible call-up at a later date. By 23 February, the Joint Staff had revised these figures to 51,100 and 186,100 (total).

As General Wheeler went to Vietnam, the President went to the LBJ Ranch for the Washington's Birthday weekend. During this period, Walt Rostow kept the President informed by the regular flow of intelligence

and situation reports plus a daily summary of his own which the President had requested. In addition, Rostow asked for (and received) two joint assessments on the situation by Westmoreland and Wheeler.

In addition to the normal Pentagon staffing, Rostow briefed General Taylor and Secretary of Defense designate, Clark Clifford, on developments and met with Secretary of ^{State}~~Defense~~ Rusk. Rostow informed the President at the Ranch that:

- The situation in Hue and Quang Tri was improved.
- Additional attacks were expected.
- After the enemy had launched another major attack, they might seek to negotiate before the weather turned in our favor.
- There was considerable anxiety in Saigon.
- "For the first time, General Abrams was permitting himself to be encouraged" by the recovery of ARVN and the pacification program.
- General Taylor would have CIA and DIA ~~to~~ review the enemy order of battle to determine enemy forces available and whether an extra two enemy divisions were being brought into South Vietnam.
- General Taylor felt that "right now we should be moving out to Westy all the ready forces we have and calling up Reserves for a Vietnam counter-attack, Korean contingency, general purposes for our world posture."
- Rusk observed we might wish to modify the San Antonio formula.
- Harry McPherson and Ginsburgh were working on new speech drafts, in case they might be needed.

Rather than waiting for General Wheeler's return, the President asked that General Wheeler's conclusions be forwarded immediately by message. Accordingly, on Sunday, the 25th, the President was informed of General Wheeler's tentative conclusions, plus his recommendation that no specific action be taken until he returned to Washington and presented his final report.

On Tuesday, the 27th, the following group met in Washington to consider General Wheeler's tentative recommendations: Secretary Rusk, Secretary McNamara, Mr. Clifford, Under Secretary Katzenbach, Bill Bundy, Harry McPherson, Joe Califano, and Walt Rostow.

Rostow forwarded to the President at the Ranch the key questions raised during the meeting, plus the view that the only firm agreement reached was that the President ought not to make a final decision at the planned breakfast meeting the next day, but should order a team to go to work full time to staff out the alternatives. He suggested that Clark Clifford might chair this intensive working group.

At breakfast the next morning, Wednesday, February 28th, General Wheeler presented to the President a six-page memorandum and an oral report on his and General Westmoreland's views. That evening, he forwarded a comprehensive report on his visit to Vietnam.

General Wheeler confirmed his earlier tentative conclusions. The major points were:

- The enemy's offensive had not yet run its course.
- The South Vietnamese forces had performed remarkably well in most places, but they were not yet out of the woods.
- The consensus of responsible commanders was that 1968 would be the pivotal year.
- U.S. forces were in good combat shape, but there were some critical logistics problems.
- In many areas, the pacification program had been brought to a halt, and it was now a question of which side moves fastest to gain control of the countryside.
- If the enemy synchronizes his expected major attacks with increased pressure throughout the country, General Westmoreland's margin would be paper-thin.
- The rough estimate of added strength requirements was:
 - a first increment of 108,000 troops by May;
 - a second increment of 42,000 not later than 1 September, and
 - a follow-on increment of 55,000 by the end of the year.

After an extensive discussion of the subject, the President appointed Clark Clifford to chair a committee to come up with recommendations to him by the following Monday, March 4th. Other members of the committee were Secretary Rusk, General Wheeler, General Taylor, Mr. Helms, Secretary McNamara, Secretary Fowler, and Walt Rostow.

In a three-hour meeting at the Pentagon that afternoon, a draft directive was discussed, issues debated, and work assignments parceled out. In addition to the question of troops, the committee considered: strengthening South Vietnamese efforts, strategy, financial issues, public affairs, and Congressional action.

Over the next few days, a series of meetings were held culminating in a meeting on Monday, March 4th. Late that afternoon, Secretary Clifford presented the committee's findings to the President.

The committee recommended:

- An immediate decision to deploy to Vietnam about 22,000 additional personnel and three tactical fighter squadrons (whose deployment had previously been deferred).

- A forceful approach to the GVN to get certain key commitments for improvement, tied to increased U. S. effort and increased U. S. support for ARVN.

- Approval of a Reserve call-up to be able to meet the balance of Westmoreland's request and to restore the U. S. strategic reserve. (A staff estimate indicated this would involve a call-up of 262,000.)

- Reservation of the decision to meet Westmoreland's request in full -- dependent on the situation and improved GVN performance.

- Initiation of a study on possible new political and strategic guidance for Vietnam.

- No new peace initiative.

The committee was divided on bombing policy. General Wheeler and others advocated a substantial extension of targets and authority in and near Haiphong, mining of Haiphong and naval gunfire up to a Chinese buffer zone. Others advocated a seasonal step-up through the spring without these added elements.

Meanwhile, on March 3d, General Westmoreland reported that although there had been no highly publicized major operations, there had been a general resumption of aggressive offensive operations throughout the country.

On Friday afternoon, March 15th, Secretary Clifford presented a package providing for:

- a deployment of 30,000 men to Vietnam;
- early call-up of 37,000 Reserves; and
- a follow-on call-up of 48,000 Reserves.

At the Tuesday lunch meeting on March 19th, the President indicated he wished to see a draft speech by the 21st. The draft included an initial call-up of 48,000 men and the possibility of a later call-up of about the same size.

On March 14th, at lunch Dean Acheson proposed that:

- we make available the forces needed in the next emergency months; and
- there be an assessment of the past and future and then a progressive disengagement over whatever period of time is judged appropriate.

By March 20th, the initial call-up was recalculated at 50,000 instead of 37,000

On the night of 22/23 March, the battle for Khe Sanh reached a climax. A major enemy attack was expected. In fact, more than 1,100 rounds were fired on Khe Sanh that night. However, the ground assault never materialized because it was pre-empted by close-in B-52 strikes. Not until a week later did Westmoreland launch his ground columns to reopen the land route to Khe Sanh. By the time they reached Khe Sanh against unexpectedly light resistance, they discovered that the battle had long before been won by the courage of the besieged Marines and an unparalleled volume of airpower at a cost of 15,000 - 30,000 enemy dead.

On Saturday, March 23d, Harry McPherson suggested a cessation of bombing north of the 20th parallel and the dispatch of representatives to Geneva and Rangoon to await the North Vietnamese. On Monday, the 25th, Rostow the President told to get Clifford's and Rusk's comments at once.

Rostow had already transmitted to Secretary Rusk the President's desire for a positive proposal. Monday afternoon Rusk wrote that he was thinking along the same lines as McPherson and transmitted a draft that he had planned to take up with the "wise men" (the informal Foreign Policy Advisory Group), which was scheduled to meet that afternoon.

Instead of sending representatives to Geneva and Rangoon, however, the Secretary preferred to put the monkey on the back of the two co-chairmen of the Geneva Conference to get in touch with both sides to see what was possible.

Monday evening the Advisory Group was briefed in the State Department and asked to give their judgment in three broad areas of policy:

- Possible U. S. force increases and related strategy.
- U. S. negotiating posture.
- Bombing policy in relation to negotiating posture or separately.

On Tuesday, the 26th, the group met with the President at lunch to discuss these issues.

On the evening of March 28th, Ambassador Bunker was informed that Washington was thinking of an early policy announcement that would contain the following:

- Major stress on increasing GVN and ARVN effectiveness.
- Call-up and dispatch to Vietnam of 13,500 support forces to round out the 10,500 combat units which had been sent in February.
- Call-up of 48,500 additional Reserves to replenish the strategic reserve.
- Related tax increases and budget cuts already largely needed for non-Vietnam reasons.
- Cessation of bombing roughly north of Vinh.

Bunker was directed to act urgently to obtain the concurrence of Thieu and Ky so that an announcement could be made Sunday night, the 31st. He was informed that most likely Hanoi would denounce the project and, thus, free our hand after a short period. The period of demonstrated restraint, however, ^{would} probably have to continue for a period of several weeks.

Twelve hours later Bunker was informed that Washington needed to know how things stood with the GVN by Saturday morning, because of the time required for additional consultation before the announcement.

On Saturday afternoon, messages were dispatched to inform the troop-contributing countries, Laos and the UK, of the planned Presidential statement on Sunday night. About the time the messages were going out, the President was informed of a successful sally from Khe Sanh resulting in the death of 115 enemy and 9 U. S.

On Sunday, Rostow reported to the President favorable reactions to the planned speech from the troop-contributing countries. The President approved advance diplomatic notification to Canadians, Indians, Soviets, U Thant, and the Pope.

Meanwhile, at noon on Sunday, Rostow informed the President that Westmoreland's offensive to open up Route 9 to Khe Sanh had begun.

Thus, a speech which was first conceived on January 31st during the opening days of the seige of Khe Sanh was delivered on March 31st as the seige was being raised.