

# LBJ Claims Lead Role In De-escalating War

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Former President Lyndon B. Johnson says he was the one—and not Gen. William C. Westmoreland—who initiated the study leading to the request for about 206,000 more U.S. troops for South Vietnam in early 1968.

The troop request, which Mr. Johnson characterizes as Westmoreland's response to "contingency" questions involving possible stepped-up Communist military activities worldwide, led to a broad and intensive review of U.S. policy and finally to the March 31 decision to de-escalate the war.

Mr. Johnson says he himself—and not Secretary of Defense Clark M. Clifford—initiated the broad review.

The former President's version of Vietnam policymaking, which varies in many

respects from other accounts, was made public last night in the second installment of his televised memoirs over CBS.

As Mr. Johnson tells it:

- Secretary of State Dean Rusk, who was generally considered a hard-liner on the war, was the man who proposed the March 31 bombing halt over most of the territory of North Vietnam.

- Defense Secretary Clifford, generally considered the most powerful advocate of de-escalation, argued against a full bombing halt over all of North Vietnam on grounds that it would endanger U.S. troops near the Demilitarized Zone.

- The reason Mr. Johnson did not seek a declaration of war at the time of the Tonkin Gulf incident in August, 1964, was that he feared North Vietnam might have secret treaties which automatically would bring Communist China and the Soviet Union into the war.

- His hopes for progress at the peace table with North Vietnam—which he says generated his 1968 bomb-halt decisions—now "have faded away."

One thing in the broadcast which was not a surprise was Mr. Johnson's deep exasperation with critics of the war. He characterized them as "on the sidelines kicking and crying and mouthing" while he was making peace overtures to Ho Chi Minh. "When the going got hard, when the road got longer and dustier, when the casualties started coming in, why there were certain folk started looking for the cellar," he said.

Like the first installment of the Johnson TV memoirs, broadcast Dec. 27, this set of recollections was filmed in mid-September and late October at the LBJ Ranch. CBS Television purchased the rights to Mr. Johnson's broadcast comments for a sum reported to exceed \$300,000.

Perhaps because of the Vietnam subject matter, the former President was less relaxed and much more fervent in the second installment. His mood ranged from passionate advocacy to obvious bitterness. Touches of broad Texas ridicule were directed at J. W. Fulbright (D-Ark.), chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, whom he caustically called "this Rhodes scholar."

The third in the series, to be televised May 2, covers the assassination of President Kennedy and promises to be highly controversial. An advertising "teaser" at the end of last night's broadcast had Mr. Johnson saying that most of what has been written about the fatal Kennedy trip to Dallas is wrong—"and I think most of it was deliberate."

See JOHNSON, A10, Col. 6



United Press International

Former President Johnson tells of his decision to halt the bombing of North Vietnam in a TV interview with Walter Cronkite (CBS).



## JOHNSON, From A1

Last night's Vietnam installment centered on the March 31, 1968, announcement halting the bombing over most of North Vietnam the turning point that led to peace talks and ultimately to de-escalation of the war. However, the discussion of the war ranged back to events four years before—the August, 1964, Tonkin Gulf resolution in which Congress authorized "all necessary steps" against aggression in Southeast Asia.

The resolution was urgently proposed to Congress after reported, and later disputed, attacks by North Vietnamese patrol boats against U.S. ships in the Gulf of Tonkin. Congress passed the resolution after three days of debate.

"It was a shame somebody didn't think of calling it the Fulbright Resolution, like the Fulbright Scholars thing, because Sen. Fulbright introduced it with his knowledge, with his approval, his consent," Mr. Johnson said.

The former President said the clear and undisguised reason for the resolution was that "if the President's going in (with troops to Vietnam), as he may be required to do, he wants the Congress to go in right by the side of him." Mr. Johnson characterized the congressional statement as meaning "the sky's the limit," and said he couldn't believe Fulbright could misunderstand the language.

Fulbright said yesterday that Mr. Johnson's televised remarks are "an absolute misrepresentation of the facts." He said that "we were deceived" about the nature of the action in the Tonkin Gulf and about the purpose of the resolution, which he said was sold as "a gimmick" to scare North Vietnam.

### 'I Explored Every . . . Way'

The former President recounted that he did not use the authority of the Tonkin Gulf resolution to send ground troops to Vietnam until July, 1965, almost a year after its passage. In the meantime, Mr. Johnson said, "I agonized, I explored every possible way, I tried to get these people (the North Vietnamese) to talk reason. I tried to keep them from coming in attacking our camps, and killing their people. I tried to get them not to infiltrate. But they were determined to do one thing, and that's take over this little country. And if they take that one over, they were determined to take over others in my judgment, just as Hitler was."

The military high point of the war came later, at the Vietnamese Lunar New Year or Tet of last January, 1968. Mr. Johnson maintained that he had informed the Australian government on a visit to Canberra more than a month before Tet that "we're going to get an al-out kamikaze attack, an assault with everything they've got, with their entire stack in for the purpose of trying to roll over us and have another Dienbienphu." He said, though, that the timing of the attack, during the Tet holiday, was a surprise.

Mr. Johnson characterized the Tet offensive as "a disaster, a debacle and a



**CLARK CLIFFORD**  
... role minimized



**DEAN RUSK**  
... linked to bomb halt



serious military loss" for the Communist side. "I don't think that ever got communicated to the American people," he said. At home, it was "a psychological victory for them" (the Communist side), he maintained—"immediately the voices just came out of the holes in the wall and said, 'Let's get out.'"

#### 'Optimism That's Not Justified'

The former President conceded that the official optimism of late 1967 may have been a contributing factor to the public shock at Tet. "Gloom and doom and defeat and mouthing and griping, really, is not the kind of spirit you want to send your men off to battle with," he said. "And of course, you're never justified in going beyond the facts, I don't think any official even intentionally did . . . (but) there was some basis—that in the middle of a war like this, all of us have optimism sometimes that's not justified."

The real shocker to official Washington and to many other Americans was the revelation in March, 1968, that despite U.S. claims that Tet was a defeat for the enemy, the administration was considering the dispatch of 206,000 more U.S. troops to South Vietnam.

If Gen. Westmoreland's forces were defeating the enemy as claimed, many people asked, why is he asking for 206,000 more troops?

"Gen. Westmoreland didn't initiate the request," Mr. Johnson explained in the telecast. "The President initiated the request."

#### 'Rather Alarming' Signs

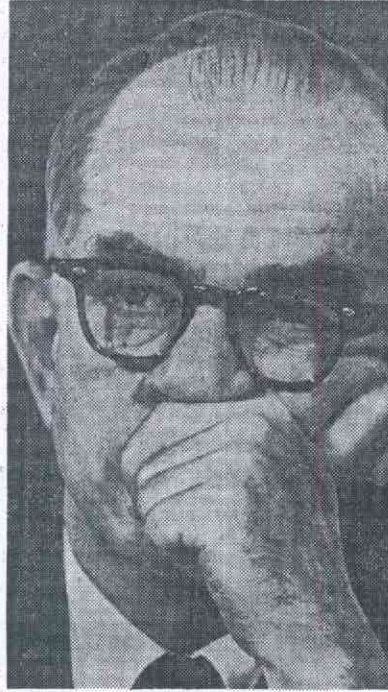
He explained that at the time—a few weeks after Tet—there were "rather alarming" indications that Communist forces in Vietnam and elsewhere in the world would initiate a wave of incidents requiring a "beefing up" of U.S. armed strength. One possibility was that South Korean units fighting in Vietnam would be called home because of North Korean military escalation, Mr. Johnson indicated.

"So I called in my leaders, the Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs and others and said to them, 'One of the first things we ought to do is to find out what we must do to insure that our men are capable of victory and have the necessary support, weapons etcetera,'" Mr. Johnson said.

According to him, this was the genesis of the Vietnam trip of Gen. Earle Wheeler, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and a resulting recommendation from Wheeler and Westmoreland for 205,304 more men as "a plan for a long-term basis anticipating many contingencies . . . if everything went bad . . ."

After receiving the Wheeler-Westmoreland proposal, he said, he ordered a broad review. Reading from a paper, he quoted a Feb. 23, 1968 memorandum to the Secretaries of State and Defense directing them to develop recommendations in response to the troop request.

"I wish alternatives examined," he read from the paper. Among the issues listed for study were: "What military and other objectives in Vietnam are additional U.S. forces designed to advance? What



SEN. J. W. FULBRIGHT  
... 'this Rhodes Scholar'

out. As Mr. Johnson tells it, a trusted public servant—probably in the Pentagon—told a reporter of the troop request and said, "Johnson's going to order 206,000 men out there. It's going to ruin the country."

"So the headline is: Johnson Implementing Recommendation of Westmoreland for 206,000 — and these men are going," the former President complained. The actual headline on the troop request leak, in the New York Times of March 10, 1968, was: Westmoreland Requests 206,000 More Men, Stirring Debate in Administration. The text of the story said that "the President has not yet decided." A senior adviser was quoted as saying that Mr. Johnson "is keeping an open mind."

In his ultimate decision Mr. Johnson agreed to send only 13,500 additional troops to Vietnam—the last major troop increment ever authorized—and he decided to halt the bombing of most of North Vietnam in hopes that the Hanoi regime would come to the peace table.

The former President said in the TV interview that on March 5 or 6, 1968, Rusk told him "I think the time has come to stop the bombing above the 20th Parallel."

He added that "some of them suggested — I think Secretary Clifford suggested that we stop the bombing on condition that the North Vietnamese do something. And Secretary Rusk said, 'That won't work, this reciprocity won't work.'"

"What was your reaction?" asked interviewer Walter Cronkite.

"Get on your horses and get it back to me as quick as you can with your recommendations," Mr. Johnson said he told his advisers. "I felt pretty generally that way about everything Rusk recommended," he added.

Mr. Johnson said U.N. Ambassador Arthur Goldberg had suggested to him "perhaps the most constructive" proposal — for a full bombing halt over all of North Vietnam. "Secretary Clifford took the position that you would endanger your troops in the DMZ area, endanger many American lives and be gambling on something that you weren't justified in gambling on, that if there's any disposition on the part of the North Vietnamese to respond, they'd respond if you'd eliminated the bombing of 90 per cent of their population area," Mr. Johnson said.

specific danger is their dispatch designed to avoid? . . . What probable Communist reactions do you anticipate in connection with each of the alternatives you examine? What negotiating posture do we strike in general? . . . What major congressional problems can be anticipated? . . . What problems can we anticipate in U.S. public opinion? . . . You should assure the highest possible degree of security up to the moment when the President's decision on these matters is announced."

Despite the plea for secrecy, the story of the troop request and review leaked