

Westmoreland's March 18 Memo On Increase in Forces

Excerpts from cablegram from Gen. William C. Westmoreland, commander of United States forces in Vietnam, to Pacific command, March 18, 1967, as provided in the body of the Pentagon study. Paragraphs in italics are the study's paraphrase or explanation.

On 18 March, General Westmoreland submitted his analysis of current MACV force requirements projected through FY 68. This request was to furnish the base line for all further force deployment calculations during the Program 5 period. In preface to his specific request, COMUSMACV reviewed his earlier CY 67 requirement which asked for 124 maneuver battalions with their necessary combat and combat service support, a total strength of 555,741. This figure was the maximum figure requested during the Program 4 deliberations. The approved Program 4 package included only 470,336 and was considerably below the MACV request, a fact which led to the series of reclaims described in Section II. Westmoreland related that MACVCINCPAC had not strongly objected earlier to the 470,000 man ceiling because of adverse plaster impact and the realities of service capabilities, but, subsequent reassessment of the situation had indicated clearly to him that the Program 4 force, although enabling U.S. force to gain the initiative did not "permit sustained operations of the scope and intensity required to avoid an unreasonably protracted war."

As the cable continued, the American commander in Vietnam briefly restated his earlier assessment of enemy trends: That the enemy had increased his force structure appreciably and was now confronting Free World Military Forces with large bodies of troops in and above the DMZ, in the Laotian and Cambodian sanctuaries and certain areas within SVN. In light of this new appraisal, he had established an early requirement for an additional 2-1/3 divisions which he proposed be accommodated by restructuring the original 555,741-man force package pro-

posed during Program 4. This force was required "as soon as possible but not later than 1 July 1968." Part of the reasoning was that this in effect constituted no more than a 6-month "extension" of the CY 67 program and as such would permit shifting force programming from a Calendar Year to a Fiscal Year basis, a shift long needed in COMUSMACV's estimation to make force programming for Vietnam compatible with other programs and to provide essential lead time in the procurement of hardware. Westmoreland then looked further ahead, noting:

... It is entirely possible that additional forces, over and above the immediate requirement for 2 1/3 Divisions, will materialize. Present planning, which will undergo continued refinement, suggests an additional 2-1/3 division equivalents whose availability is seen as extending beyond FY 68.

Then as if to take the edge off his request, COMUSMACV turned attention to two programs which were becoming increasingly attractive to American decision-makers. These were development of an improved RVNAF and an increase in the other Free World Military Forces committed to the war in Vietnam. He commented that despite the force ceiling on RVNAF currently in effect some selective increase in Vietnamese capabilities was required, such as creation of a suitable base for establishing a constabulary, an organization vital to the success of the Revolutionary Development program. Westmoreland stated that it was the position of his headquarters that provision for any and all Free World Military Forces was welcomed as "additive reinforcements," but they would be treated as additions

only, thereby having no effect upon U.S. force computations.

The concept of operations under which the new forces he requested were to be employed varied little in its essential aspects from that outlined in MACV's February "Assessment of the Military Situation and Concept of Operations," which had reached Washington but a week earlier. However, the new cable integrated the new forces as part of the MACV operational forces. Westmoreland reviewed the period just past then turned to the future:

... our operations were primarily holding actions characterized by border surveillance, reconnaissance to locate enemy forces, and spoiling attacks to disrupt the enemy offensive. As a result of our buildup and successes, we were able to plan and initiate a general offensive. We now have gained the tactical initiative, and are conducting continuous small and occasional large-scale offensive operations to decimate the enemy forces; to destroy enemy base areas and disrupt his infrastructure; to interdict his land and water LOC's and to convince him, through the vigor of our offensive and accompanying psychological operations, that he faces inevitable defeat.

Military success alone will not achieve the US objectives in Vietnam. Political, economic and psychological victory is equally important, and support of Revolutionary Development program is mandatory. The basic precept for the role of the military in support of Revolutionary Development is to provide a secure environment for the population so that the civil aspects of RD can progress.

He then detailed corps by corps the two troop request requirements labeling them the "optimum force" [4-2/3 Divs] and the "minimum essential force" [2-1/3 Divs]:

B. Force Requirements FY 68

(1) The MACV objectives for 1967 were based on the assumption that the CY 67 force requirements would be approved and provided expeditiously within the capabilities of the services. However, with the implementation of Program Four, it was recognized that our accomplishments might fall short of our objectives. With the additional forces cited above, we would have had the capability to extend offensive operations into an exploitation phase designed to take advantage of our successes.

(2) With requisite forces, we shall be able to complete more quickly the destruction or neutralization of the enemy main forces and bases and, by continued presence, deny to him those areas in RVN long considered safe havens. As the enemy main forces are destroyed or broken up, increasingly greater efforts can be devoted to rooting

out and destroying the VC guerrilla and communist infrastructure. Moreover, increased assistance can be provided the RVNAF in support of its effort to provide the required level of security for the expanding areas undergoing Revolutionary Development.

(3) Optimum Force. The optimum force required implement the concept of operations and to exploit success is considered 4-2/3 divisions or the equivalent; 10 tactical fighter squadrons with one additional base; and the full mobile riverine force. The order of magnitude estimate is 201,250 spaces in addition to the 1967 ceiling of 470,366 for a total of 671,616.

(A) In I Corps, the situation is the most critical with respect to existing and potential force ratios. As a minimum, a division plus a regiment is required for Quang Tri Province as a containment force. The latter has been justified previously in another plan. Employment of this force in the containment role would release the units now engaged there for expansion of the DaNang, Hue-Phu Bai and Chu Lai TAOR's as well as increase security and control along the corps northern coastal areas. One of the most critical areas in RVN today is Quang Ngai Province even if a major operation were conducted in this area during 1967, the relief would be no more than temporary. A force is needed in the province to maintain continuous pressure on the enemy to eliminate his forces and numerous base areas, and to remove his control over the large population and food reserves. The sustained employment of a division of 10 battalions is mandatory in Quang Ngai Province if desired results are to be realized. Employment of this force would provide security for the vital coastal areas, facilitate opening and securing Route 1 and the railroad and, perhaps equally important, relieve pressure on northern Binh Dinh Province.

(b) In II Corps, the task is two fold: destroy the enemy main and guerrilla forces in the coastal areas; and contain the infiltration of NVA forces from Cambodia and Laos. Continual expansion both north and south of the present capital coastal TAOR's opening and securing Route 1 and the railroad, securing Route 20 from Dalat south to the III Corps boundary, destruction of enemy forces in Pleiku and Kontum Provinces, and containment of enemy forces in the Cambodian and Laotian sanctuaries are all tasks to be accomplished given the large area in II Corps and the continuous enemy threat, an optimum force augmentation of four separate brigades is required to execute effectively an exploitation of our successes. An infantry brigade is needed in northern Binh Dinh Province to expand security along the coastal area and to facilitate operations in Quang Ngai Province to the north. A mechanized brigade in the western highlands will assist in offensive and containment op-

erations in the Pleiku-Kontum area. An infantry brigade in the region of Nam Me Thout is needed to conduct operations against enemy forces and bases there and to add security to this portion of II Corps now manned with limited ARVN forces, and finally, a mechanized brigade is needed in Binh Thuan Province to neutralize the enemy forces and bases in the southern coastal area, and to open and secure highway 1 and the national railroad to the III Corps boundary.

(c) In III Corps, operations to destroy VC/NVA forces and bases in the north-

western & central parts of the corps area and to intensify the campaign against the enemy's infrastructure are being conducted. These operations are to be completed by intensive efforts to open and secure the principal land and water LOC's throughout the Corps Zone. However, deployment of the US 9th Div to IV Corps will create a gap in the forces available in III Corps to operate against seen significant base areas in Phuoc Tuy, Bin Tuy, and Long Lanh Provinces. These areas constitute the home base of the still formidable 5th VC Division. This unit must be destroyed, its bases neutralized and Route 1 and the national railroad opened and secured. Other critical locales that will require considerable effort are War Zone D and Phuoc Long area in which the VC 7th Division is believed to be located. With the forces operating currently in III Corps, substantial progress can be made, but to exploit effectively our successes an addition of one division, preferably air mobile is required. By basing this division in Bien Hoa province just north of the RSSZ, it would be in position to conduct operations against the 5th Div, and War Zone D, as well as to reinforce the US 9th Div in Delta operations as required.

(d) In IV Corps, with deployment of the US 9th Div to the Corps area and with increasing success of ARVN operations there, the situation will be greatly improved. Primary emphasis will be given to destroying VC main and guerrilla units and their bases, to intensifying operations to extend GVN control, to stopping the flow of food stuffs and materials to the enemy through Cambodia, and to assisting in the flow of goods to GVN outlets in Saigon. In addition emphasis will be accorded the opening and securing of principal water and land LOC's which are the key to all operations in the Delta. It is noteworthy on this score, that effectiveness of forces available is hampered severely by an inadequate mobile riverine force. In IV Corps, the essential requirement is to flesh out the mobile riverine force with three APB's (Barracks Ships) one ARL (repair ship), and two RAS (river assault squadrons).

(4) The Minimum Essential Force necessary to exploit success of the current offensive and to retain effective

control of expanding areas being cleaned of enemy influence is 2-1/3 divisions with a total of 21 maneuver battalions. One division, with nine infantry battalions—each with 4 rifle companies—and an ACR of three squadrons are required. The other division of nine maneuver battalions, each battalion organized with four rifle companies is required in Quang Ngai Province. Four tactical fighter squadrons, each generating 113 sorties per month per identified maneuver battalion, are required. Two squadrons will be stationed at Phu Cat and two at Tuy Hoa. One C-130 or equivalent type squadron can provide adequate airlift and is justified on the basis of current planning factors: This SQD would be based at Cam Ranh Bay. A minimum essential logistic base can be provided by selective augmentation of NSA Danang, and by provision for lift capability equivalent to eight LST's in addition to two LST's identified previously for the containment force in Quang Tri Province. Two nondivisional Army combat engineer battalions and four Army construction battalions will be required to support divisional engineering effort to augment two navy construction battalions that previously have been identified with the containment force in Quang Tri Province.

(b) Effectiveness of the US 9th Division's operations in IV Corps will be degraded unacceptably without adequate mobility on the waterways. For this reason, addition of two river assault squadrons with their associated support is deemed essential. The Mekong Delta Mobile Riverine Force originally was tailored and justified as a four RAS level. This requirement still is valid. The primary media of transport in the Delta are air and water. Air mobility is recognized as critical to success of operations in the area, but the size of offensive operations that can be mounted is limited by the inherent physical limitations of airborne vehicles. Accordingly, any sizeable offensive operation such as those visualized for the US 9th Division must utilize the 300km of waterways in the Delta to exploit tactical mobility. Maintenance of LOC's and population control in the areas secured by the division's operations, along with extension of the interdiction effort, necessitates expansion of the game warden operation. Fifty PBR's can provide this capability based on experience factors accrued thus far