

March 28 Westmoreland Cable To Joint Chiefs on Troop Needs

Excerpts from cablegram from General Westmoreland to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, "MACV FY-68 Force Requirements," March 28, 1967, as provided in the body of the Pentagon study. Paragraphs in italics are the study's phrase or explanation.

On 26 March COMUSMACV submitted to the CINCPAC Requirements Task Group a detailed troop listing for the 2-1/3 division "minimum essential force." Other than providing a detailed list of TO&E's and unit small strengths, the document provides little of interest. It did stipulate that the northern portion of the minimum essential force would be directed toward an expanded infiltration interdiction mission and that the southern portion of the force would pursue "presently prescribed operations."

In a follow-up message to the Task Requirements Group on the 28th of March COMUSMACV again commented on the restrictive aspects of Program 4. This in turn was picked up and amplified by CINCPAC in a message to the JCS on the same day. CINCPAC pointed out that as of 9 March 1967 Program 4 was 38,241 spaces short of full implementation and that this figure included spaces for five battalions or their equivalents which could not be considered for trade-off purposes. All of these spaces, especially the battalion equivalents, were significant elements when considered within the perspective of MACV's operational requirements and could not be deleted without seriously impairing MACV capability to achieve its objectives. In light of this shortfall in Program 4 CINCPAC requested that the JCS reconsider its earlier proposal that a 4th rifle company be added to all U.S. Army infantry battalions in Vietnam. The logic behind such a raise in program ceiling which would increase materially the combat power and effectiveness of the infantry without increasing unit overhead was irrefutable in CINCPAC's eyes. CINCPAC proposed that the addition of the rifle companies, a total of 8,821 men, be added to the Program 4 ceiling for a total of 479,231 of all services. The space requirements for the 2-1/2 division minimum essential force reflected in the COMUSMACV request would then be added on to the adjusted Program 4 total of 479,000. However, in the event that any or all of the spaces reflected in that 479,000 were not approved or that the package itself would be reduced, the Pacific Commander predicted grave curtailment in MACV operations and a danger that the operational objectives set for the force requirements initially would not be achieved.

By 28 March the JCS through the CINCPAC group had the detailed justification and planning calculations for the COMUSMACV 67 force requirements in hand. MACV had added little that was new in the way of strategic concept other than to reaffirm their intention to concentrate on certain priority areas in each corps tactical zone. Priority areas themselves were selected because they seemed best suited to achieve destruction or neutralization of enemy main forces and bases — persistently prime MACV goals. Despite this strong declaration of intent MACV hedged by noting that "the enemy will be struck wherever he presents a lucrative target." Forces would also be maintained by MACV outside the priority areas to contain the enemy in his out of country sanctuaries. In this connection, the planners anticipated that there would be large scale offensive operations continuously conducted during FY 68 to detect and destroy infiltration or invasion forces in the DMZ-Highland Border regions.

If the forces outlined under the optimum force request were granted priority was to be accorded to the expansion of secure areas. The RVNAF

would be given the primary responsibility of providing military support of Revolutionary Development activities and Revolutionary Development operations would be intensified throughout the country as the pacified areas were expanded, MACV explained that such increased demands on the RVNAF would establish a concomitant demand for additional U.S. force resources to fill the operational void resulting from the intensified Revolutionary Development orientation of the RVNAF. The long message also broke out the minimum essential and optimum package forces by service and by total troops as shown in the table below.

	STRENGTH (2 1/2 Div Min essential Force)	STRENGTH (2 1/2 Div Addi- tion for optimum force package)	STRENGTH (Total Opti- mum Force)
Army	49,359	100,527*	169,886
Navy	5,739	8,023	13,762
Air Force	5,368	9,891	15,259
Marines	110	0	110
TOTAL	80,576	118,441	119,017
	*Includes 5,547 spaces required to incorporate MACV Study recommendations.		

The total optimum force end strength was 678,248 arrived at by adding the approved Program 4 strength of 470,000 to the earlier MACV reclama of 8,821 (see page 68 this section) and the "optimum force" additive of 199,017. The justification for additional forces broken out by corps tactical zones were essentially the same as those presented in the original MACV request on 18 March. However, the later document prepared at PACOM Hqs on the 28th reflected the increased concern with the enemy threat developing in the I Corps tactical zone. Concerning this threat, COMUSMACV wrote:

In I Corps tactical zone, the bulk of the population and the food producing regions are within 15 miles of the coast. In the northern part of the zone, multiple NVA Divisions possess the capability to move south of the DMZ. Additionally, there is constant enemy activity in much of the coastal area. The topography of I Corps lends itself to the establishment and maintenance of enemy base areas in the remote, sparsely populated regions. The enemy has operated for years virtually unmolested throughout most of Quang Ngai Province because friendly forces could not be diverted from other important tasks.

There are several important tasks which must be performed in I Corps. Security of bases and key population centers must be maintained. The area under GVN control must be extended by expanding existing TAOR's, and by opening and securing major LOC's, particularly Route 1. The enemy must be contained in his sanctuaries, and denied use of infiltration and invasion routes. Enemy main forces and bases must be sought out and destroyed. Surveillance and reconnaissance in force throughout the CTZ must complement the tasks discussed above.

The deployment of a division and an armored cavalry regiment to Quang Tri Province, south of the DMZ, would make it possible for Marine Corps units now conducting containment operations to secure and expand tactical areas of responsibility (TAOR's).

The RVNAF and US/FWMAF will intensify operations against organized enemy forces and base areas in and near the populated and food producing areas of the coastal plains thus denying them access to population and food resources.

Clearing and securing operations will be pursued to facilitate the expansion

of the secured areas, the ultimate goal being to connect the Hue-Phu Bai, Danarig, and Chu Lai TAOR's. The following major LOC's will be opened and secured: Route 9, from Route 1 to Thon San Lam; and Route 1 and the railroad throughout the entire length of I CTZ, including the spur to the An Hoa industrial complex.

One of the most critical areas in the RVN today is Quang Ngai Province. A division is required there to maintain continuous pressure on the enemy, to eliminate his forces and numerous base areas, and to remove his control over large population and food resources.

Sustained employment of a division in Quang Ngai would obviate the necessity to use other forces to meet a critical requirement. The division would provide security for the coastal area, facilitate opening and securing Route 1 and the railroad, and relieve some of the pressure on northern Binh Dinh Province. Of particular significance is the support which would be provided to the RVNAF in securing the important Mo Duc Area with its dense population and three annual rice crops. Additionally, deployment of the division as discussed above would allow III MAF to expand its clearing and securing operations into the heavily populated Tam Ky area north of the Chu Lai TAOR. Long term security must be provided for both of these areas so that Revolutionary Development can progress.

Failure to provide two and one-third divisions for I CTZ would result in the diversion of existing forces from other tasks to deny and defeat infiltration or invasion. Security in support of Revolutionary Development could not be increased to the desired degree in the coastal area, the major LOC's could not be opened throughout the CTZ, and the enemy would be able to continue operating virtually unmolested throughout the key Quang Ngai Province.

It is emphasized that the relationship of the two and one-third division force requirement for I Corps to that of Practice Nine is coincidental. This force is the minimum essential required to support operations planned for FY 68 without reference to Practice Nine.

The next most dangerous situation appeared to be that in II Corps, a diverse geographical area which included major population centers along the coastal plains as well as sizeable population centers and military bases on the western plateau such as Binh Dinh, Anke, Kontum, and Pleiku. Here the enemy, orienting himself on the population, presented a different problem which, in the words of General Westmoreland, required "a high degree of mobility and flexibility in U.S./FWMAF/RVNAF." As he analyzed the corps tactical situation, Westmoreland re-emphasized what he had already said about containing the large enemy military forces at the boundaries of the sanctuaries:

Enemy forces in the Pleiku and Kontum areas must be destroyed, and infiltration from Cambodia and Laos must be contained. Forces in-country will continue to make progress in areas of current deployment. Those programmed for deployment will augment this effort. However, there are gaps, as discussed below, that must be filled before success can be exploited and minimum essential security can be provided within the II Corps area.

Large enemy forces remaining in heavily populated Binh Dinh Province must be destroyed. Security must be established and maintained in the northern portion of the province, particularly along the coastal area, so that Revolutionary Development can progress. These security forces also will facilitate the conduct of operations in Quang Ngai Province.

Inadequacy of forces in the border areas is a significant weakness in II Corps. Reinforcement of units in the western highlands is needed to assist in the conduct of offensive and containment operations. With the large enemy forces located in border sanctuaries, II Corps is faced constantly with the possible requirement to divert critical resources from priority tasks to counter large scale intrusion.

The most pressing military objective in III Corps area was to expand security radically from the Saigon-Cholon area. MACV planned to accomplish this primarily by standard clearing and security operations featuring an intensified campaign conducted to root out the VC infrastructure. In conjunction with this, continuous pressure presumably in the form of search and destroy operations would be applied to the enemy in War Zones C and D, the Iron Triangle to the enemy would provide a protective angle, and the base area clusters in the Phuoc Long area. Denial of these areas shield behind which the Revolutionary Development programs could operate. However, deployment of the U. S. 9th Division to the 4th Corps area would create a gap in the forces available in III Corps and seriously degrade the capability to provide this shield. The possible repositioning of the assets existing within III Corps to either I CTZ in the north or the 9th Division relocation just to the south just mentioned could also seriously limit the offensive capabilities in the northern and central portion of III Corps. Accordingly, COMUSMACV expressed an urgent requirement for an additional division for III Corps. This unit would be positioned just north of the Rung Sat operation zone and would assist in maintaining the protective shield around Saigon-Cholon. Revolutionary Development operations would then be able to proceed unhindered and operations against the VC 5th Division could be reinforced in required.

Throughout the force requirement justifications, one is immediately struck by the implicit ordering of the priorities for assignment of forces and missions. It is quite clear that the "minimum essential force" which COMUSMACV requested was intended to be employed against VC/NVA main force units in a containment role in the border areas and a destruction-disruption mode in I CTZ as well as the base areas within the country itself. Those forces over and above the "minimum essential," so la-

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belled the "optimum force," were those intended to take up the slack in the RD "shield" role. MACV, probably rightly, calculated that not even mini-

mal gains such as were forthcoming in the under-manned RD program would be possible unless the VC/NVA main force operations could be stymied and kept from directly assaulting the "shields."

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