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JCSM-63-68

29 JAN 1968

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

Subject: The Situation at Khe Sanh

1. You will recall that on 12 January 1968 General Westmoreland informed me that the Khe Sanh position is important to us for the following reasons: (a) it is the western anchor of our defense of the DMZ area against enemy incursions into the northern portion of South Vietnam; (b) its abandonment would bring enemy forces into areas contiguous to the heavily populated and important coastal area; and (c) its abandonment would constitute a major propaganda victory for the enemy which would seriously affect Vietnamese and US morale. In summary, General Westmoreland declared that withdrawal from Khe Sanh would be a tremendous step backwards.

2. At 0910 hours this morning I discussed the Khe Sanh situation by telephone with General Westmoreland. He had just returned from a visit to northern I Corps Area during which he conferred with senior commanders, personally surveyed the situation, and finalized contingency plans. General Westmoreland made the following points:

a. The Khe Sanh garrison now consists of 5,000 US and ARVN troops. They have more than a battalion of US artillery supporting them, and 16 175 MM guns which can fire from easterly positions in support of the Khe Sanh force.

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b. Among other reinforcing actions, he has moved a full US Army Division into northern I Corps. Within a few days the equivalent of an ARVN airborne division will also reinforce this area.

c. He has established a Field Army Headquarters in the Hue/Phu Bai area to control all forces, both US and ARVN, in northern I Corps. This headquarters is commanded by General Abrams.

d. General Momyer, Commander 7th Air Force, is coordinating all supporting air strikes in the NIAGRA area which constitutes the locale of enemy buildup around Khe Sanh.

e. Air action since 17 January has been remunerative. About 40 B-52 sorties per day and some 500 tactical air sorties per day are being conducted in the NIAGRA area. There have been numerous secondary explosions. It appears that air strikes and our artillery fire have disrupted the enemy's logistic buildup and troop concentration.

3. General Westmoreland stated to me that, in his judgment, we can hold Khe Sanh and we should hold Khe Sanh. He reports that everyone is confident. He believes that this is an opportunity to inflict a severe defeat upon the enemy. Further, General Westmoreland considers that all preparatory and precautionary measures have been taken, both in South Vietnam and here, to conduct a successful defense in the Khe Sanh area.

4. The Joint Chiefs of Staff have reviewed the situation at Khe Sanh and concur with General Westmoreland's assessment of the situation. They recommend that we maintain our position at Khe Sanh.

For the Joint Chiefs of Staff:

SIGNED

EARLE G. WHEELER
Chairman
Joint Chiefs of Staff

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