

Document #1—Memorandum to President Lyndon Johnson March 4, 1968, prepared by Secretary of Defense Clark Clifford

[Recommendations to the president regarding General Westmoreland's request for additional troops.]

1. An immediate decision to deploy to Vietnam an estimated total of twenty-two thousand additional personnel (approximately 60 percent of which would be combat). An immediate decision to deploy the three tactical fighter squadrons from Program 3 (about one thousand men)....
2. Either through Ambassador [to South Vietnam] Bunker or through an early visit by Secretary [of Defense] Clifford, a highly forceful approach to the GVN [government of South Vietnam] ([President] Thieu and [Vice-President] Ky) to get certain key commitments for improvement, tied to our own increased effort and to increased U.S. support for the ARVN [army of the Republic of South Vietnam]....
3. Early approval of a [armed forces] reserve call-up and an increased end strength adequate to meet the balance of the Westmoreland request and to restore a strategic reserve in the United States, adequate for possible contingencies world-wide....
4. Reservation [delay] of the decision to meet the [General] Westmoreland request in full. While we would be putting ourselves in a position to make these additional deployments, the future decision to do so would be contingent upon:
 - a. Reexamination on a week-by-week basis of the desirability of further deployments as the situation develops;
 - b. Improved political performance by the GVN [government of South Vietnam] and increased contribution in effective military action by the ARVN [army of the Republic of South Vietnam];
 - c. The results of a study in depth, to be initiated immediately, of possible new political and strategic guidance for the conduct of U.S. operations in South Vietnam, and of our Vietnam-ese policy in the context of our world-wide politico-military strategy....

[Assessment of the U.S. war effort in Vietnam, included in an appendix of the memorandum.]

There can be no assurance that this very substantial additional deployment [requested by General Westmoreland] would leave us a year from today in any more favorable military position. All that can be said is that the additional troops would enable us to kill more of the enemy and would provide more security if the enemy does not offset them by lesser reinforcements of his own. There is no indication that they would bring about a quick solution in Vietnam and, in the absence of better performance by the GVN [government of South Vietnam] and the ARVN [army of the Republic of South Vietnam], the increased destruction and increased Americanization of the war could, in fact, be counter-productive....

[No matter what the result in Vietnam, we will have failed in our purpose if]:

- a. The war in Vietnam spreads to the point where it is a major conflict leading to direct military confrontation with the U.S.S.R. [Soviet Union] and/or China;
- b. The war in Vietnam spreads to the point where we are so committed in resources that our other world-wide commitments—especially NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization]—are no longer credible;
- c. The attitudes of the American people towards “more Vietnams” are such that our other commitments are brought into question as a matter of U.S. will;
- d. Other countries no longer wish the U.S. commitment for fear of the consequences to themselves as a battlefield between the East and the West....

Under these circumstances, we should give intensive study to the development of new strategic guidance to General Westmoreland. This study may show that he should not be expected either to destroy the enemy forces or to rout them completely from South Vietnam. The kind of American commitment that might be required to achieve these military objectives cannot even be estimated. There is no reason to believe that it could be done by an additional two hundred thousand American troops or double or triple that quantity...

The exact nature of the strategic guidance which should be adopted cannot now be predicted. It should be the subject of a detailed interagency study over the next several weeks....