Activity 7: General Westmoreland Promises to End the War
Timeline: 1967

Students will review General Westmoreland’s assessment of the progress in the war and his request for an additional 200,000 troops to end the war within two years. The Pentagon also recommended increasing US bombing in North Vietnam along the Chinese border as well as mining North Vietnamese harbors.

Video Clips:
- Pressure to Increase the Scope of War
- Johnson Seeks a Middle Ground

Summarizing Points:
- General Westmoreland’s speech to Congress
- What more is needed to end the war in two years
- Secretary McNamara’s memo to President Johnson

Supporting Materials
- In a private memo from Secretary McNamara to President Johnson, May 19, 1967, McNamara warned:

  “There may be limits beyond which many Americans and much of the world will not permit the United States to go. The picture of the world’s greatest superpower killing or seriously injuring 1,000 noncombatants a week, while trying to pound a tiny backward nation into submission on an issue whose merits are hotly disputed, is not a pretty one. It could conceivably produce a costly distortion in the American national consciousness and in the world image of the United States.”

- General Westmoreland’s address to Congress, April 28, 1967.
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1MF_emSW3ko

Activity Procedure
1. View the first video segment, “Pressure to Increase the Scope of War.”

2. Have students review the excerpt from the McNamara memo and listen to General Westmoreland’s speech before Congress. Summarize the main points of each and compare their messages.

3. Discuss the segment as a class using the summarizing points. Explain to students
that though the United States was bringing unprecedented firepower to the war, little gain seemed to be made. The military kept asking for just “a few more” troops and bombing raids, but many government officials were becoming nervous of America’s image in the world.

Tell students: Faced with a decision, President Johnson has asked you to make a recommendation whether (or not) to approve Westmoreland’s request for an additional 200,000 troops and the request from the Joint Chiefs of Staff to bomb sites just below the Chinese border and to mine the harbors of North Vietnam. Will you advise him to approve or not approve?

**Students can work in groups or individually to determine their recommendation. They should be prepared to present and defend their decision**

4. Show the final segment, “Johnson Seeks a Middle Ground,” which reveals what Johnson decided to do and why. Have students compare and contrast their decisions with that of Johnson and then write a brief analysis of Johnson’s and their own decisions.

**Post-Activity Questions:**
- What surprised you about Johnson’s decision to take the middle course? Does this change your decision in any way? Explain.
- What is your opinion of Johnson’s decision? Explain.
- What might have been the outcome if Johnson had chosen a different option, like following Secretary McNamara’s suggestion to limit troop levels and declare an unconditional end to all bombing of North Vietnam or sending the number of troops Westmoreland requested and agreeing to the Joint Chiefs of Staff request to increase bombing?
- Do you feel the question you wrote for General Westmoreland would have contributed to the discussion and helped Johnson make a decision on Westmoreland’s request? Explain why.