

# WITHDRAWAL SHEET (PRESIDENTIAL LIBRARIES)

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#94a notes	<p>Notes from 3/26/68 — 10:30 a.m. meeting with Gen. Wheeler, JCS, and Gen. Creighton Adams [Sanitized NLJ 83-24]</p> <p>Secret 8 pp. <i>from FRUS Vol VI item 156</i></p> <p><i>Sani 12/02</i></p>	3/26/68	A

## FILE LOCATION

Tom Johnson's Notes of Meetings, Box 2

## RESTRICTION CODES

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MARCH 26, 1968 - 10:30 a.m.

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MEETING WITH GENERAL EARLE WHEELER, JCS  
AND GENERAL CREIGHTON ABRAMS

SERVICE SET

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

March 27, 1968

FOR THE PRESIDENT

FROM: Tom Johnson

Attached are the notes of your meeting with General Wheeler and General Abrams in the Family Dining Room on March 26, 1968.

Those attending the meeting were:

The President  
General Earle Wheeler  
General Creighton Abrams  
Tom Johnson

The meeting began at 10:30 a.m. The meeting ended at 12:15 p.m.

VOICE SET

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9/1/68

NOTES OF THE PRESIDENT'S MEETING  
WITH  
GENERAL EARLE WHEELER, JCS  
AND  
GENERAL CREIGHTON ABRAMS

March 26, 1968  
Family Dining Room

DECLASSIFIED  
Authority NLS 83-24, FRUS VOL VI <sup>ITEM 156</sup>  
By ics <sup>JDW</sup>, NARS, Date 9-16-16 <sup>11-4-83</sup>

GENERAL WHEELER: General Westmoreland told me today that with the forces he now has available he does not fear a general defeat. However, the lack of adequate reserves could permit the enemy a tactical victory.

General Westmoreland says the enemy has the capability to reinforce over the next two months with two divisions.

THE PRESIDENT: What does our intelligence, our best intelligence, tell us about the number of men the enemy has put into the South?

GENERAL WHEELER: In the period from late December to late January, they moved in 30 battalions of North Vietnamese or about 18,000 new combat troops not including support. The total with support would be about 30,000 to 35,000 not including fillers.

THE PRESIDENT: What would the complete total be including fillers?

GENERAL WHEELER: 50,000.

THE PRESIDENT: Are they still moving in fast?

GENERAL WHEELER: There are 16 radio terminals coming down toward the DMZ. The best intelligence estimates these as fillers, not troop units. One group is 600 strong -- it could be a battalion or replacement group. The enemy needs replacement because the casualties have been high.

THE PRESIDENT: I believe that General Westmoreland asked for troops because:

- (1) He doesn't have what he needs
- (2) Substantial infiltration
- (3) Continued infiltration from the north

GENERAL ABRAMS: It is clear to me that replacements are coming in for 70,000 lost since Tet began. There will be a total of 20 groups of men with 7,000 to 9,000 per group. The men in charge have reported how many there are in a group and what types of men. In one message, they asked how to get uniforms for the civilians.

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We have run into men for NVA who had no training per se except in the march down.

THE PRESIDENT: Howard Tuckner of NBC says they have 250,000 troops in reserve. What are the facts?

General Abrams then showed the President a picture of two captured Viet Cong. One was 12 years old; the other was 14 years old. One carried a U.S. Carbine and one carried an AK-47.

GENERAL ABRAMS: In the Viet Cong units, they are putting NVA replacements.

THE PRESIDENT: What are the best figures we have on infiltrators from the North -- civilian or military?

GENERAL ABRAMS: 60,000. We got two brigades - 10,500 men. total.

GENERAL WHEELER: The enemy has 200,000 men in the north to protect against amphibious attack. He also has anti-aircraft and rocket units. His reserves are not unlimited.

General Westmoreland thinks they can put two divisions (25,000 men) in for reinforcements. It could give the enemy a tactical victory.

He doesn't think it will be Khesanh. It will be Hue or Quang Tri or in the Central Highlands.

THE PRESIDENT: Has Khesanh been busted up, or just used as a ploy?

GENERAL WHEELER: He got clobbered with air and artillery. He is now going after Hue and Saigon.

THE PRESIDENT: Are we vulnerable at Hue?

GENERAL WHEELER: No.

GENERAL ABRAMS: No, absolutely not.

GENERAL WHEELER: General Abrams was in the Hue area.

GENERAL ABRAMS: We have planned on going out to Khesanh - to bring trucks in April and conduct operations around there. April is a good time. There is more flyable weather.

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Whether you hang on to Khesanh is a matter of flexibility. We don't have to have Khesanh as a price of geography.

THE PRESIDENT: Except for our vetoing certain targets, how do we run the war out of here?

GENERAL WHEELER: Not at all. He's run in the field.

THE PRESIDENT: Didn't we tell General Westmoreland we would let him do what he wants to do and we would support him?

GENERAL WHEELER: Yes.

GENERAL ABRAMS: Westy feels that way.

GENERAL WHEELER: General Westmoreland is there in South Vietnam. He has complete authority. He can't go across the DMZ. There are limits on Laos and Cambodia.

THE PRESIDENT: Whose strategy is used?

GENERAL WHEELER: It is completely from Westmoreland.

THE PRESIDENT: Do we handicap him?

GENERAL WHEELER: No.

THE PRESIDENT: I want you to have flexibility you need, General Abrams. I told Westy if you want to see it through, you move.

GENERAL ABRAMS: Westy decided to stay in Khesanh himself.

GENERAL WHEELER: He can move in or out.

THE PRESIDENT: Did you (JCS) review this?

GENERAL WHEELER: Yes.

THE PRESIDENT: With the exception of a few bombing targets, General Wheeler, General Westmoreland, Secretary McNamara, Secretary Clifford and State are in general agreement about the conduct of the war?

GENERAL WHEELER: Yes. The ARVN are doing well, Westy said.

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THE PRESIDENT: I want you to meet with that group today. Stress that you have worked with the South Vietnamese closely. Tell them, in candor, we want to talk to you about the South Vietnamese.

(The general impression was depressed, and the low morale in the briefing last night by the CIA.)

Give them the factual, cold honest picture as you see it. We don't want an inspirational talk or a gloom talk. Nitze won't even testify. It is the civilians that are cutting our guts out.

THE PRESIDENT: We weren't caught asleep during Tet. They lost 50,000. They are trying their damndest to recover.

Give them your plan, hope and belief.

Car<sup>V</sup>er and DePuy weren't up to par last night. I want both of you at lunch. I want General Abrams to give us the whole picture - pros and cons.

The bitterness has built up here. We hope we aren't attacked while this is going on.

General Ridgway said the strategic reserves are down to nothing. He said he thinks we have more commitments than we can handle.

SECRETARY RUSK: If we can't see some reasonable date, this country can't support a bottomless pit.

GENERAL WHEELER: The ARVN is doing well. The morale is good.

THE PRESIDENT: Stress that, General Abrams.

GENERAL WHEELER: I asked General Abrams about no reporting of ARVN activities.

THE PRESIDENT: Say you found C+ or B- or whatever you think should be said. Make a maximum effort to get SVN to do what they can.

GENERAL WHEELER: Westy said he understands the situation in the U. S. He wants the Program Five forces to include three tactical fighter squadrons. He would like to have the forces he now has in the country - the 27th RLT and the 82nd Airborne. I told him we must replace the 27th RLT by an army unit because of the Marines training needs.

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He will now move the 101st Airborne to the South-Central highlands for flexibility of action. He wants 13,500 support troops, or might have to cancel the civilianization progress. Westy said he could make progress with the forces he has.

He said he should have a ready element in Hawaii in case something goes wrong. If he gets nothing, it will reduce his flexibility to meet the enemy activity and would require certainly some military achievements. He said he did not want to preempt the views of his successor. General Abrams and I have discussed the situation rather extensively. He has been on the ground eleven months.

THE PRESIDENT: Our fiscal situation is abominable. We have a deficit running over 20. We are not getting the tax bill. The deficit could be over 30. If it does, the interest rate will raise. The British pound may fall. The Canadian pound may fall. The dollar will be in danger. Unless we get a tax bill it will be unthinkable.

They say to get \$10 in taxes we must get \$10 in reductions of appropriations. We have to take one half from non-Vietnam defense expenditures. That will cause hell with Russell. If we don't do that we will have hell. What happens when you cut poverty, housing and education?

This is complicated by the fact it is an election year. I don't give a damn about the election. I will be happy just to keep doing what is right and lose the election.

There has been a panic in the last three weeks. It was caused by Ted Kennedy's report on corruption and the ARVN and the GVN being no good. And now a release that Westmoreland wants 206,000 men, and a call-up of 400,000. That would cost \$15 billion. That would hurt the dollar and gold.

The leaks to the New York Times hurt us. The country is demoralized. You must know about it. It's tough you can't have communications. A worker writes a paper for Clifford group and it's all over Georgetown. The people are trying to save us from ourselves. You must bear this in mind.

Bobby advocated: (1) Rusk resigning. (2) Placing the war in the hands of a Commission. I said no.

I will have overwhelming disapproval in the polls and elections. I will go down the drain. I don't want the whole alliance and military pulled in with it.

Ambassador Goldberg wants us not to bomb North Vietnam for three weeks. Secretary Clifford has a plan to stop above the 20th parallel, and his infiltration. We must have something.

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I wouldn't be surprised if they repealed the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. Senator Russell wants us to go in and take out Haiphong. Senator McCarthy and Senator Kennedy and the left wing has informers in the departments. The Times and the Post are all against us. Most of the press is against us.

How can we get this job done? We need more money in an election year, more taxes in an election year, more troops in an election year and more cuts in an election year.

As yet I cannot tell them what they expect to get in return. We have no support for the war. This is caused by the 206,000 troop request, leaks, Ted Kennedy and Bobby Kennedy.

I would give Westmoreland 206,000 men if he said he needed them and if we could get them.

GENERAL WHEELER: They will settle for the 13,500 plus the Air Force squadrons.

THE PRESIDENT: The reports are depressing about the Reserves.

GENERAL WHEELER: A squadron of A-1s is going into Laos at the end of this month or early next month.

THE PRESIDENT: Is there anything we should be doing that we aren't doing?

GENERAL WHEELER: Our basic strategy is sound. We can't fight a war on the defensive and win. Westmoreland has tried to go on the tactical offense. In certain places he must defend - such as Cam Ranh Bay. Within our strategy there are tactical variations.

GENERAL ABRAMS: I don't feel we need to change strategy. We need to be more flexible tactically inside South Vietnam. Khesanh is an example. Khesanh hasn't turned out too bad. We have had 5,000 men and irregulars there, and 20,000 loads of bombs on their two divisions. Their losses have been tremendous.

It looked as though they were going to attack on the 23rd. We put B-52s and Tactical Air in. They did start shelling (1100 rounds). The battalions had trouble getting to jump-off places. Another never came. Khesanh hasn't turned out to be a bad thing for us.

He has one division left - shifted one division. We think he has been persuaded not to attack Khesanh. He has lost munitions and fuel.

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Now we will open the road to relocate Khesanh so we can support it better and bring more power to bear.

I think three tactical fighter squadrons should go under program 5.

The brigade of 82nd or equivalent should stay.

THE PRESIDENT: Has there been any bitching from the men?

GENERAL ABRAMS: No. I saw a Negro First Sergeant in the 82nd Brigade. He has been back a year. He told me he had been in Vietnam 18 months. He had been in the 1st Cavalry Division. Had been a Platoon leader. He has a wife and kids. He was asked, what do you think about being here now? He said he believes we are doing the right thing and that we should be there. The morale is tops. General Seitz has taken care of the wives and families at Fort Bragg. The men had to take off and hadn't had their income tax for 1967 filled out. All of them are good soldiers. Eighty percent are Vietnam veterans.

THE PRESIDENT: Do you have 100,000 fighting men out of 500,000, or how many?

GENERAL ABRAMS: About 38% or more.

GENERAL WHEELER: It is nearer 200,000.

GENERAL ABRAMS: Yes.

THE PRESIDENT: Can you say the other 60%, if were extended, what would that do? Ask those not in combat to extend 60 days.

GENERAL WHEELER: One twelfth of the force comes out every month.

THE PRESIDENT: 30,000. Would 60 days more cause any problem? We might make it 30-60-90 days. Limiting them to 12 months has given us good morale.

Take an extra 90 days for those who aren't in combat.

GENERAL WHEELER: There will be some problems. This is difficult to find men who haven't been fired on. I think it would shoot morale to hell.

GENERAL ABRAMS: I would not do it.

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THE PRESIDENT: Can you do it by volunteers?

GENERAL ABRAMS: I would be hopeful you could have volunteer drives on that. Out of the non-combat types you get high percentage of volunteers. My judgment is that we should call up a small percentage of reserves.

P. I want you to tell them all the things that are true. Be sure it is factual. If you soldiers were as gloomy and doomy as the civilians you would have surrendered.

Give thought to how we can maintain the best posture in the world with what we have out there.

I think a senior person who believes in what we are doing ought to meet the Korean President next Saturday in Honolulu.

Nitze says he would resign if we sent extra troops. What we have been doing has got us in a mess.

GENERAL ABRAMS: There are a lot of good civilians.

THE PRESIDENT: What can we do to hold South Vietnam and keep North Vietnam from taking it over? I want you to be able to do in South Vietnam what needs to be done.

I like Westmoreland. He was one of four recommended to me. The other three were: General Abrams, General Palmer and General Johnson. Westmoreland has played on the team to help me.

The Stennis hearings hurt us. The Civilians in both departments hurt us. I started in 1966 trying to get a surtax. I've made no progress on taxes. I've got a deficit of \$30 billion.

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