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#9a notes	Notes from 4/6/68 - 1:30 p.m. President's meeting with Gen. William Westmoreland - Washington, D.C. [Sanitized NLJ-CBS 38] Top Secret 9 pp.	4/6/68	A
#10 notes	Handwritten notes from 4/6/68 meeting Top Secret 13 pp.	4/6/68	A

FILE LOCATION

Tom Johnson's Notes of Meetings, Box 3.

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2
APRIL 6, 1968 - 1:30 p.m.

PRESIDENT'S MEETING WITH GENERAL
WILLIAM WESTMORELAND

The President	Secretary Clifford
General Westmoreland	Harry McPherson
Nick Katzenbach	George Christian
Averill Harriman	Abe Fortas
General Wheeler	Horace Busby
General Taylor	Jim Jones
Dick Helms	Walt Rostow
	Tom Johnson

MEMORANDUM

9

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

April 7, 1968

~~TOP SECRET~~

FOR THE PRESIDENT

FROM: Tom Johnson

Attached are the notes of your meeting with General William Westmoreland in the Mansion on April 6, 1968.

Those who attended the meeting were:

The President
General Westmoreland
Nick Katzenbach
Averill Harriman
General Wheeler
General Taylor
Dick Helms
Secretary Clifford
Harry McPherson
George Christian
Abe Fortas
Horace Busby
Jim Jones
Walt Rostow
Tom Johnson

The meeting began at 1:30 p.m. The meeting ended at 5 p.m.

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DECLASSIFIED

E.O. 12356, Sec. 3.4(b)

White House Guidelines, Feb. 24, 1983

By DCH, NARA, Date 3-6-91

MEETING NOTES
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April 6, 1968

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NOTES OF THE PRESIDENT'S MEETING WITH
GENERAL WESTMORELANDApril 6, 1968
In the Mansion

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Document # 2

Those attending were:

The President

General Westmoreland

Nick Katzenbach

Averill Harriman

General Wheeler

General Taylor

Dick Helms

Clark Clifford

Harry McPherson

George Christian

Abe Fortas

Horace Busby

Jim Jones

Walt Rostow

Tom Johnson

The President: I want General Westmoreland to report on:

- a. Successor to General Westmoreland
- b. Deputy Commander
- c. Military Advisor
- d. Views on Harriman draft
- e. Suggestions he has to Harriman
- f. Report on military position in Vietnam, particularly at Khesanh and along DMZ.
- g. Evaluation of enemy
- h. Evaluation of ARVN
- i. Evaluation of tactics

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By iss, NARS, Date 10-9-84

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SERVICE SET

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General Westmoreland:

1. Since Tet enemy has suffered colossal military defeat. He has lost 60,000 men and 18,000 weapons.

2. I say to Ambassador Harriman he will be negotiating from position of strength.

3. The enemy has manpower and logistical problems.

4. North Vietnam has 20,000 men moving down. He needs 40,000 to fill depleted ranks. He needs replacements everywhere.

5. Tet offensive dates back to last summer. Lost their advocate of protracted war strategy. They moved away from that strategy in September 1967 and initiate a major two-phase offensive, first stage was ^{the} offensive at Dakto. He attempted to cut Highway 4 leading to Delta to put economic pressure on Saigon. This was designed to take headlines from inauguration of newly-elected South Vietnam government and secure real estate. This was designed to be coup d'etat. He thought he would get a public uprising and mass defections in ARVN and by whole units. He was deceived by the American press into thinking the ARVN were no good. He found they were stronger than expected.

Viet Cong infiltrated with the crowd.

He did catch South Vietnam off guard in many places.

Intelligence showed he would attack in Tet period but not on D-day for psychological reasons.

He expected to dominate the "3-10 military district" and to be successful in the highlands.

I chose to hold Khesanh. We reinforced in December and January. We wanted to force him to commit. It was small enough to supply by air.

The enemy suffered severe defeat at Khesanh. He lost 10,000 to 15,000 men and 325th had to retreat to Laos.

I know there was great concern back here about Khesanh. This was a Dienbienphu in reverse. We created best targets we have had during the war. From mid-January until a few days ago we had 6,000 secondary explosions and 1,300 bodies seen on the ground knocked out 900 bunkers and 300 gun positions.

North Vietnamese are not ten feet tall as press has portrayed them. The Dienbienphu veterans are old, grey-haired men now.

The ARVN performed well. Introduction of M-16 to ARVN has helped them greatly.

We should have produced M-16 rifles sooner and given them to ARVN one year earlier. But we got in patent fights and debates between lawyers.

Harriman will have hand with four aces and enemy will have a hand with two duces.

He has 8 2/3 divisions in North Vietnam now. He could bring down two divisions, well-equipped but not well led.

He could set up multiple fronts. He has DMZ fronts, MR 10 front, 10-3 front.

The President: What do you think of South Vietnam government and Army?

General Westmoreland: My advisers made a study of the South Vietnam armed forces:

- | | | |
|------------------------------------|---|---------------------|
| a. Navy | } | received high marks |
| b. Marines | | |
| c. Air Force | | |
| d. Army - 5% poor
28% excellent | | |
| 67% satisfactory | | |

RF and PF fought well except in 4th Corps. Only 2% did not.

Enemy made maximum use of weapons. They were superior to ARVN weapons.

As for government, Thieu is gaining stature and self-confidence.

There is a conflict between Thieu and Ky but I am not worried about it.

I think they both should stay.

There is friction between Thieu and Vien because of quarrel between two wives.

Vien will resign when I leave (Westmoreland). That will not hurt. He has been very receptive to advice. Kim or Tri may come back to head Joint General Staff.

Would bring Kim back as Minister of Defense and Vy as chief of Joint General Staff.

Vy is respected by other generals, but he would not be a dynamic leader.

We need a replacement for 3rd Corps commander.

4th Corps commander is breath of fresh air.

I had Abrams explain U.S. attitude toward the war to South Vietnamese commanders. I gave them a hard-line pep talk. I made analogy of Battle of Bulge. This appeals to them very much.

Walt Rostow: Were they shook up over bombing pause and President's announcement?

General Westmoreland: They were puzzled by it. I urged the South Vietnamese to take the fight to a weakened enemy.

General Taylor: Was Thieu concerned?

General Westmoreland: I explained it to them. They are sensitive about a coalition government but they are reconciled to moves we have made so far.

Newspapers tried to make them believe this would lead to Communist takeover.

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- 5 -

Walt Rostow: What about necessary equipment of RF and PF?

General Westmoreland: We will give them M-2's and BAR's plus machine guns and mortars. We are giving them light anti-tank weapons.

General Taylor: How can you bring ^{this} home to American officials, ~~this~~ It is not a losing proposition.

Dick Helms: If you relieve a seige of a bastion, you get headlines.

The President: He has worse ^a problem with press than we do.

General Westmoreland: I am under instructions to play down relief of Khesanh.

Clark Clifford: What is situation around Khesanh?

General Westmoreland: There are still 7 or 8 battalions there. I do not know if they will stand and fight.

General Wheeler: Why have they counterattacked Hill 471? He may have been trying to protect corridor.

Clark Clifford: How is Route 9?

General Westmoreland: This route will be open next Tuesday. We will not try to maintain permanent security. We will route convoys in there.

General Taylor: How are you supplying Khesanh task force?

General Westmoreland: By air and land, air drop extraction.

General Wheeler: I feel that playing offensive low-key was prudent and wise. Press discounts MACV briefing session.

The time has come for efforts back here to look at relief of Khesanh in proper perspective. There is great story here. Not a single day when supplies haven't been dropped in. Bombing support has been great.

Westy had two divisions tied down.

~~TOP SECRET~~

Clark Clifford: What is the situation in Ashan Valley?

General Westmoreland: It is an unusual piece of terrain 20 kilometers long and 1 kilometer wide.

The enemy has dominated and developed in the Valley. I hope to go in during May. Enemy moves by truck. He has upgraded road east toward Hue.

Ash^u is at division line between Northeast and Southeast. Weather bad except in April and May. It is a major logistic base. It goes through tip of Laos. Enemy has strong anti-aircraft system in there. We captured 23 mm munitions.

Harry McPherson: Have you noticed any change in the enemy since the peace overture?

Is the enemy in a position to capture a city, score a tactical victory, or attack Saigon?

General Westmoreland: He will have some initiatives.

The President: What would happen if we stopped all bombing?

General Westmoreland: It would facilitate their supply during rain, Laos supply roads would be bad anyway. But he can run convoys in North Vietnam day and night and build up

The President: If he accepted San Antonio formula, what would our situation be?

General Westmoreland: It is going to be tough to determine whether or not he is "taking advantage."

The enemy will insist on cease fire in South. This would be an intolerable condition.

The President: What about his forces at home?

General Westmoreland: He can bring down two divisions in the next 2 or 3 months.

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- 7 -

General Westmoreland: 20,000 in two divisions. He could recruit 21,000 in the South. He could augment by 60,000 men. ~~We~~^{He} may lose 60,000 by that time.

We think we are inflicting 20,000 losses a month on him now.

He may withdraw into Cambodia. I am skeptical about Phnom Penh (Cambodia) as site for talks. Many Cambodians are working with Viet Cong.

If we could bomb over there it would be very disconcerting to him.

The President: They would impeach me.

Nick Katzenbach: Senator Mansfield thinks Sihanouk is the greatest leader in the Far East.

The President: Have they ordered fire stopped against DMZ.

General Wheeler: Pattern of attacks remain relatively constant. We have encountered less resistance North and South of Route 9.

Averill Harriman: I agree that a cease-fire is impossible. In de-escalation we talked about demilitarization of the DMZ.

General Westmoreland: I hope he does fight.

The President: Are you glad he changed his tactics?

General Westmoreland: Yes, sir.

It has accelerated the attrition inflicted on the enemy. He has suffered a military defeat of major magnitude.

The President: Is the light ^{at the end} of the tunnel any nearer?

General Westmoreland: Yes, South Vietnam can take over bigger share of burden. Losses in the last few days have made that statement more credible.

Clark Clifford: Under what condition would a cease-fire be acceptable?

General Westmoreland: I do not see the acceptability of that.

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Nick Katzenbach: When you think of a ceasefire, do you know another way to approach it?

General Westmoreland: We would like for the North Vietnamese to go home and turn in their weapons.

Abe Fortas: We must have a different term from ceasefire.

Clark Clifford: One of the great goals on the minds of Americans is for a "ceasefire."

One of the big problems is that we would have tough time determining if they were "taking advantage" without aerial reconnaissance.

General Wheeler: Near DMZ we must have low-level reconnaissance. First test of de-escalation step is that they must be tangible.

The President: Do we have a contact?

Nick Katzenbach: Message in Vietnam was transmitted.

Tonight Collingwood will be on television from Tokyo.

Walt Rostow: We could jump them. Say we have a response we are following.

Averill Harriman: On April 3 you learned of Hanoi message, you acted on it and message was delivered by midnight.

The President: I am ready to play honest with Collingwood. I think somebody is playing dirty pool with me.

Nick Katzenbach: On 6:30 broadcast, Collingwood will take two minutes. Let's put out that we took initiative. His information was given to U.S. government and will be acted on promptly.

Did the President establish contact?

Yes

On day of April 3.



(4)

~~TOP SECRET~~

(3+)
(5)

We established contacts.

We have further information which does not appear to be a response to our proposal for Geneva.

You saw statement from Hanoi. You conveyed willingness to accept on same day. We have informed ^{all} contacts which do not appear to be an answer to what you say.