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Thieu Again Hints Drive Into the North Is Possible

By CRAIG R. WHITNEY

Special to The New York Times

SAIGON, South Vietnam, March 3 — For the second time in a week, President Nguyen Van Thieu has made a public statement hinting that an invasion of North Vietnam is not out of the question. But he did not commit his Government to any such course of action.

Mr. Thieu made his latest remarks at a closed meeting of generals and pacification officials in Ducmy on the central coast, but his press secretary released an official version to the press here late tonight.

The statement said that after reviewing the course of the 18,000-man South Vietnamese operation in Laos and of the 23,000-man campaign in Cambodia, Mr. Thieu said, "At the present time I cannot say in advance what will happen."

"Moreover, although we have to think about attacking the Communists in North Vietnam, then it will just be because they themselves have put us in a situation which forces us to think about that option in order to legitimately defend ourselves," he continued.

"If the Communist North Vietnamese want to avoid that course of action," the official version of the statement said, "then they had better stop immediately their aggression in the South and withdraw their troops back to the North."

"I wish that the Communist North Vietnamese would soon awaken to the reality, and not put us in a situation which forces us to attack them right in their own territory.

"In other words, we let the authorities in Hanoi to decide by themselves whether or not they want to be attacked by us right in their own territory, which is North Vietnam."

Such threats, if they should be called that, have been made often in the last month, first by President Thieu's political rival, Vice President Nguyen Cao Ky, then on Feb. 24 by Mr. Thieu himself, who said an invasion "was only a matter of time."

Repeated later attempts to get the official Government spokesman to confirm or clarify

the Thieu remarks were to no avail, and Vietnamese journalists with official connections took offense at dispatches in the Western press saying that talk of invasion was mostly grist for Saigon's rumor mills.

President Thieu's press office went to great length to insure that Western news organizations got the statement tonight.

American official sources said they were aware that such a statement was going to be released but that they had not seen it. On Feb. 17, President Nixon said in Washington that if South Vietnamese troops moved into the North, the operation would have to have his prior approval if United States support was required.

The previous talk of invasion is thought to have been designed more for psychological than military reasons, to keep the North Vietnamese guessing. Talk of invasion is also satisfying and morale building in the context of Vietnamese politics. President Thieu faces an election this year.

'No Discussions' at White House

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, March 3 — The White House said today that there had been "no discussions" in the Nixon Administration about the prospect of a South Vietnamese military thrust into North Vietnam, with or without American support.



Associated Press

President Nguyen Van Thieu