

The President of South Vietnam, Nguyen Van Thieu, spoke today at a rally in Hue, South Vietnam, honoring South Vietnamese and American troops who took part in the recent invasion of Laos. President Thieu described the invasion of Laos as a "military, psychological and political Dienbienphu" for the enemy. He added that the operation will save the people of the two northern provinces of South Vietnam from major attacks similar to the Hue massacre of Tet 1968. He also said the invasion of Laos prevented the North Vietnamese from carrying out a plan to cut off the two northern provinces and using them as leverage in "trying to force us to accept a coalition government or other political settlement."

President Thieu said he is "determined not to let the Communists score any military victory that they can exploit at the Paris peace talks." He said that he will never accept a coalition government, neutrality for South Vietnam, concession of land to the North Vietnamese, or Communist parties operating openly in South Vietnam.

President Thieu said that the North Vietnamese and National Liberation Front forces are now so weak in South Vietnam that the war will either gradually die down or the North Vietnamese and NLF forces will be forced to begin serious negotiations in Paris. He said the South Vietnamese government has firm control of the countryside and said that South Vietnamese forces have the military initiative throughout the country. He said the South Vietnamese military will continue offensive operations in all four military regions of South Vietnam, in adjacent areas of Laos and Cambodia, and possibly even in North Vietnam.