

Thieu Terms Vote Test of Confidence

By ALVIN SHUSTER

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SAIGON, South Vietnam, Sept. 2—President Nguyen Van Thieu said tonight that he would view next month's presidential voting as a test of public confidence in his administration even though only his name would be on the ballot.

Speaking on radio and television, Mr. Thieu did not say what yardsticks he would use to measure the public's support or lack of it. He said, in effect, that in the absence of any opposition candidates he would be the judge of the meaning of the results.

If he felt that the voting showed a lack of confidence in his presidency, he said "I will not accept another four-year term," otherwise, he said, he would begin his second term and "continue to seek peace for the people."

It was Mr. Thieu's first lengthy public statement since the withdrawal from the election of Gen. Duong Van Minh

and Vice President Nguyen Cao Ky and the collapse of American efforts to salvage at least the appearance of a contested presidential race here. American officials had said that an election with more than one candidate would demonstrate healthy progress toward a democratic structure, particularly in view of Washington's pledges to insure self-determination for the South Vietnamese and fair elections.

Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker tried and failed to persuade General Minh and Mr. Ky to run and then sought a compromise solution in frequent meetings with President Thieu. He met again to day with Mr. Thieu, who apparently briefed the Ambassador on his speech tonight.

"The fact that there remains only one candidate is no firm legal basis for postponing the election," he said. "As President, I have the duty to respect the Constitution and the law and to organize the election on the date specified by law.

"I had wished that there would be more than one candidate in the election so that the people would have an opportunity to choose between my policies and the policies proposed by other candidates. That now has proved to be impossible. That is regrettable."

Mr. Thieu put the blame for the present elections crisis on General Minh and Vice President Ky, who withdrew from the presidential race after charging that Mr. Thieu had embarked on election-rigging. He accused the two men of "slandering and insulting all national institutes and even myself."

Referring to their charges of election-fixing, Mr. Thieu said that his two potential challengers were seeking to distract public attention, sow panic among the people and create a bad impression in Vietnam and overseas. He said General Minh and Mr. Ky had "presented a view of the situation in a way that is most profitable to them."

"What is important now," Mr. Thieu said, "is the confidence of the people toward their leader. So, the coming election will be an opportunity for the people to express, by their votes, their confidence or lack of confidence toward my position and my policies.

"If I see the results of the voting confirm the confidence of the people in me, I will continue with another four-year term. But if the results show clearly that the people do not have confidence in me, I will not accept another four-year term and will step down."

White House Comment

Special to The New York Times

SAN CLEMENTE, Calif., Sept. 2—Asked today for the White House's response to President Thieu's decision to proceed with the Oct. 3 election in Vietnam, President Nixon's press secretary, Ronald L. Ziegler, commented:

"Apparently the President has decided to proceed with the election on Oct. 3 following the withdrawal of his two political rivals. In the absence of these contestants, he has apparently decided that he will modify it [the election] to a vote of confidence. That suggests he is obviously attempting to introduce an element of popular choice to the election."