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Thieu Sees No Real Peace Till After Major '73 Battle

By ALVIN SHUSTER
Special to The New York Times

SAIGON, South Vietnam, Sept. 16—President Nguyen Van Thieu said tonight that he saw no chance of meaningful peace talks in Paris until there had been an all-out military confrontation with North Vietnamese forces, which he predicted would come in 1973.

In a wide-ranging interview with 12 foreign correspondents at the Presidential Palace, Mr. Thieu also discounted the possibility of a coup d'état, defended his one-man candidacy in the presidential election Oct. 3, asked for more time to prepare for complete American withdrawal and foresaw the need for United States air support for "many years."

While he said he understood President Nixon's "need to withdraw troops before the American Presidential election" next year, he hoped that at least 50,000 Americans, and perhaps more, could remain as a residual force.

'Their Presence Vital'

"Sometimes your ground troops don't do anything," he said, "but their presence is vital. They can watch the rear while our own troops fight up front."

"You can end your ground combat role completely next year, but we will need a residual force for logistics, helicopters, advice and air support. We need more time to build our forces."

According to his timetable, the crucial year will come after most of the American ground forces have departed. Then, he predicted, the Communists will launch an all-out offensive in the northern regions in an attempt to capture such cities as Quangtri and Hue.

"That could well be the final confrontation of the war," the President went on. "If they win the territory, they will jump to the conference table to negotiate a settlement before we can take it back. If they lose it, they will either fade away or negotiate a settlement."

Although he hoped President Nixon's trip to Peking would be a move toward peace, he said he believed that China could use her influence on Hanoi for an Indochina settlement only if North Vietnam lost the 1973 showdown. Even then, he added, the settlement would be only temporary to allow "a breathing space."

Pigeon and a Pork Stew

The interview, lasting nearly five hours, started in the upstairs reception room of the four-year-old palace, which Mr. Thieu said was "more of a building than a palace." The talk continued in the modern dining room downstairs as the 48-year-old President and his guests ate several courses of appetizers, followed by pigeon, pork stew in coconut milk, and quail egg soup.

As palace waitresses in Western dress hovered about filling the gilt-edged chiana with food and the simple crystal with wine, Mr. Thieu discussed his past and future, Vice President Nguyen Cao Ky, peace and war, his days on the battlefield, his love of fishing, his desired place in history, his need for Phantom jets, his wish to vacation in Greece, Italy and Spain, and his hope to meet with President Nixon "if I am re-elected next month."

His mood at the first such session in 15 months was one of ebullience and confidence, although he tried without much success to suggest that there might be some doubt about the outcome of his unopposed candidacy.

He smiled easily, complained that his living quarters in the place resembled an office and said he regarded himself "more as a general than a politician."

The only question he declined to answer directly was whether he was kept informed of any secret American talks with North Vietnam. The answer is secret, he replied.

'One Foolish Man'

Mr. Thieu, who spoke in English, made the following points:

¶He did not foresee a military coup in response to his one-man candidacy but said he "cannot predict anything by one foolish man." He confirmed that he had told his generals that he would step down if the United States Congress drastically reduced military aid because of his unopposed election.

¶The United States Government put little pressure on him during the political crisis that developed after Gen. Duong Van Minh and Vice President Ky withdrew from the race amid charges that Mr. Thieu was rigging the election. He said Ambassador Dillsworth Bunker, who tried and failed to persuade the two potential challengers to remain in the contest, was "very correct and did not interfere with our in-

¶He was taken by surprise when General Minh pulled out of the election.

¶He is not taking Mr. Ky's threats of a coup seriously because "he has been making so many threats for so long." Mr. Thieu said he had no intention of "chasing Mr. Ky out of the country" and implied that the Vice President, an air vice marshal, could go back into the air force when his term ends.

Negotiable but Not Negotiable

As for the Paris talks, "everything is negotiable," the President said, but then he proceeded to reiterate what is not negotiable — a coalition government, pro-Communist neutralism, concessions of territory to the North and the right of Communists to operate freely in South Vietnam.

He agreed with a questioner that in essence he was saying that there could not be any political settlement until one side or the other had won the war.

Asked about American prisoners in the North, Mr. Thieu said Hanoi was determined to use them for blackmail for political concessions and even for money. He said he was "not sure that the level of American troops in Vietnam would make that much difference on the release of prisoners."

President Thieu also said he had no plans to release two prominent prisoners, Truong Dinh Dzu, who ran second in the 1967 election and then went to jail for advocating a coalition government, and Tran Ngoc Chau, an opposition Deputy jailed for Communist affiliations.

He said he recognized that the Supreme Court had annulled Mr. Chau's 10-year sentence but said the court "was not clear about releasing him."