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President Hits Out At Thieu

By George Murphy
Chronicle Correspondent

San Diego

South Vietnam's president Nguyen Van Thieu, already beleaguered by political figures in his own country, got no support yesterday from an obviously angered President Ford.

Stopping short of urging Thieu's resignation, as the South Vietnamese Senate has done ("it's not my prerogative"), Mr. Ford nonetheless decried Thieu's "unilateral" decision to withdraw from three military areas in the face of Communist onslaughts.

The withdrawal, Mr. Ford told a private meeting of news executives here yesterday morning, was "improper and unnecessary."

Mr. Ford had prefaced that comment by saying "I guess this should be off the record," but word of it leaked to the national press within an hour after he said it.

At a nationally televised press conference later in the day, the President softened his remarks somewhat, but the inference drawn by almost all observers was the same: Thieu had erred.

"The unilateral military decision to withdraw created a chaotic situation in Vietnam that appears to have brought about tremendous disorganization," Mr. Ford said.

Asked, "Unilateral decision by whom?" Mr. Ford replied: "It was a unilateral decision by President Thieu to order a withdrawal from the broad, exposed areas that were under the control of the South Vietnamese military."

The President then was asked if he could explain "why President Thieu, with our close military ties as allies, did not tell you what he was going to do in terms of the retreat."

Mr. Ford replied shortly: "I think the only answer to that can come from President Thieu."

White House observers said it was the first time a major American political figure had directly attacked Thieu for a military decision made without consulting this country.

At his private breakfast, Mr. Ford said, it was learned, that his military experts had told him a withdrawal "is the most difficult military maneuver to undertake."

"The commanders of mili-

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tary zones one, two and three were not prepared for such a withdrawal," the President was reported to have said.

"Also, no consideration was given to the fact that hundreds and hundreds of

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thousands of refugees would clog the highways (in the military zones)," he added.

Repeatedly at his press conference, Mr. Ford returned to the theme that while the United States has suffered setbacks in Indochina and in the Middle East, the nation's allies should believe that America will meet its commitments to them.

He enlarged upon this later in the day in an address to a White House conference on energy and the economy here.

"I must say with all the certainty of which I am

capable: No adversaries or potential enemies of the United States should imagine that America can be safely challenged, and no allies or time-tested friends of the United States should worry or fear that our commitments to them will not be honored, because of the current conditions and changing situation in Southeast Asia.

"We stand ready to defend ourselves and support our allies assuredly as we always have."

Mr. Ford will fly to the Bay Area from his Palm Springs vacation home today. He will land at Hamilton Air Force Base shortly before 10 a.m., go by helicopter to The Geysers in Sonoma county to view geothermal energy work there, then go to the St. Francis Hotel in San Francisco.

There he'll have a late lunch with the governors of nine western states. Tonight he will address the San Francisco Bay Area Council at the hotel, returning to Palm Springs late tonight.