

Ford Says U.S. Seeking Viet Truce

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Washington

President Ford said last night the United States is exploring a negotiated settlement of the Vietnam war and also is seeking a cease-fire to permit orderly evacuation of Americans and some South Vietnamese.

Mr. Ford said the explorations are going on with a number of countries but he did not name them.

However, Mr. Ford said in a CBS radio and television interview that a cease-fire does not appear possible at the moment and he is not certain whether Hanoi wants to negotiate an end to the war.

"I wish I knew," the President said.

With fast-paced events in Vietnam dominating the hour-long session, Mr. Ford said the United States has not yet had contact with the Saigon government now headed by Tran Van Huong, who took over earlier in the day when President Nguyen Van Thieu resigned.

Mr. Ford said. "There was no pressure by me or anyone else in Washington" for the resignation of Thieu, despite Thieu's charge that he was under American pressure to resign.

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"That is why we want the military operations stopped," Mr. Ford said. At the same time, Mr. Ford said there would be no problem evacuating remaining American civilians.

Turning to the Middle East in the last half of the interview, he said that another oil embargo would be "inevitable" in the event of a new war and that the United States necessarily must consider the fate of the Palestinians in looking toward an eventual overall settlement.

And yet, he added, "I am not making a commitment one way or the other" to the Palestinians.

Mr. Ford also held out the possibility of a summit meeting with Israeli Premier Yitzhak Rabin and Arab heads of state. He said the United States has not yet made a final decision among three options, including a Geneva conference, a resumption of Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger's suspended step-by-step diplomacy or fostering an interim settlement between Israel and Egypt.

On other subjects, Mr. Ford said!

- He intends to be a candidate for president in 1976 but he has not yet made "any categorical declaration." He expects to enter

the New Hampshire primary next March.

- He sees "no reason whatsoever at this point" that Vice President Nelson A. Rockefeller should not be his running mate.

- There could be "a role" in the Republican party in 1976 for John B. Connally, the former Democratic governor of Texas and one-time Treasury secretary acquitted last week of bribery charges.

- No one on the White House staff has ever made a recommendation to Mr. Ford, that Henry A. Kissinger be dropped as secretary of state and, in any event, he would reject any such suggestion. And while there may be organizational reasons for Kissinger giving up the job as head of the National Security Council he is such "an outstanding individual" it is best he stay on there as well.

- He rejects any suggestion that the Central Intelligence Agency be limited to intelligence gathering and forbidden to undertake covert operations in foreign countries. While he described these as covering a wide range of activities, some of them "most successful," he said, "certainly I shouldn't discuss specifics."

- He thinks there will be a substantial improvement in the economy in the months ahead. He also said he wouldn't favor any new regulation of the money-managing Federal Reserve Board to make it more responsive to administration and congressional policies.

Mr. Ford criticized the Thieu government for its "hasty withdrawal" before advancing North Vietnamese forces. But, he said, the "initial kickoff" of the rout was failure of the U.S. Congress to supply adequate military help to the Thieu government.

"I don't think he would have withdrawn if the support had been there," Mr. Ford said of the South Vietnamese pullback that allowed Hanoi's forces to close in toward the capital.

"But the support wasn't there. Unfortunately, the withdrawal was done hastily and chaotically."

In a related vein, Ford said there was no point in releasing correspondence of former President Nixon in order to put to rest allegations of secret pledges of support to Thieu.

"I don't think it would be a good precedent to publish this correspondence between heads of state."

Mr. Ford was interviewed in the Blue Room of the White House by Walter Cronkite, Eric Sevareid and Bob Schieffer.

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