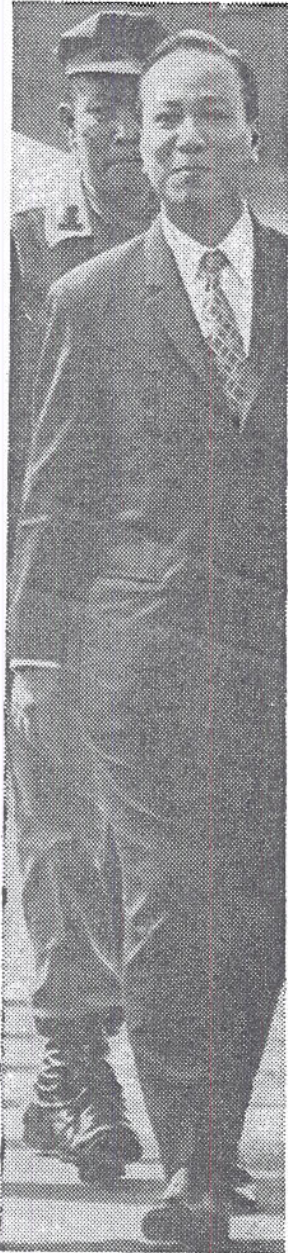


SEP 25 1972

# Thieu's Rule Tighter Since Enemies Drive



The New York Times

President Nguyen Van Thieu reviews troops.

## Direct Rule Replaces Democratic Forms

NYTimes

By CRAIG R. WHITNEY

Special to The New York Times

SAIGON, South Vietnam, Sept. 24 — President Nguyen Van Thieu has come out of the 1972 Communist offensive more powerfully in control of the machinery of Government here than ever before. But he seems to be less than sure of his own political strength and popularity among the people of his country.

Faced with both political and military problems of vast magnitude over the last six months, Mr. Thieu has dealt with both of them in the same way—by the direct exercise of personal power, dispensing with the encumbrances of American-inspired democratic institutions and governing instead through the army.

In the view of most American observers of the process and many Vietnamese, the 48-year-old President has so firmly established his power that he has left no room for an effective non-Communist opposition.

In fact, to outward appearances at least, the opposition has given up. Former Vice President Nguyen Cao Ky is living in opulent unemployment at Tansonnhut Air Base; General Duong Van Minh is spending his time at cocktail parties and receptions.

"Thieu has checkmated all the moves of the opposition," said one of General Minh's sup-

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porters, Ly Qui Chung, a member of the House of Representatives. "It is not possible to take power without the Americans."

One senior American official here said: "There's no sense in people at home kidding themselves. Thieu is the only man around."

Other Americans here are less enthusiastic about this than that official. But all of them agree there is no non-Communist alternative in sight.

### He Masters the Military

No South Vietnamese leader has ever mastered so firmly the country's military machine and its governmental administrative apparatus, which is also largely controlled and staffed by military officers.

No one since Ngo Dinh Diem's assassination in 1963 has become so independent of American control or influence while at the same time remaining so dependent on American support. Because he is confident that the support will continue—so confident that his national television and radio stations have been broadcasting blistering attacks on Senator George McGovern—he pays less attention these days to what the Americans want, even though the United States could theoretically cause his instant downfall by withdrawing its military, economic and moral support.

The fragility of this dependent relationship is apparent in the central role here of Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker, the only American official who sees Mr. Thieu frequently. Many Vietnamese regard the Ambassador as their President's alter ego, and a sudden departure by Mr. Bunker would be taken by politicians here as a sign that American support of Mr. Thieu could no longer be taken for granted.

Ambassador Bunker, who has been here since 1967, hoped to go home after the Presidential election here, last October, but after that turned into a one-man race, he stayed. Now, according to people close to him, he does not count on being able to leave until early next year.

### Less Influence on Thieu

Yet, in recent months, either Mr. Bunker has not tried to exercise influence with President Thieu on critical issues such as politics or else Mr. Thieu has not listened to him as much as he used to.

Which is the case, it is impossible to tell, since when the two men meet they are usually alone. But Mr. Bunker is known to have been disappointed when President Thieu did not go out of his way to insure a contested election last October, and last month the President did not consult the Americans when he took the important step of abolishing elections of hamlet and village officials.

Since late June, Mr. Thieu has been bypassing the elected National Assembly, even though he controls a majority in both of its houses, and has been governing by decree in the fields of national defense, finance and economy. Last Wednesday, during a trip to the northern front, he told reporters that he would not ask for an extension of his authority to rule by decree when it runs out at the end of December.

Instead, he is working to further solidify his control of the Assembly. According to one Cabinet minister, he has asked several Government officials to run for the 56-member Senate in the election next September. His supporters now have 29 seats there.

### His Removal Demanded

Because of his controlling position in the South Vietnamese administration machinery, President Thieu's removal from the political scene has become the key demand of the Vietnamese Communists for a negotiated settlement of the war.

His American patrons, who deal with the North Vietnamese at the talks in Paris, have so far rejected this as an unacceptable precondition that would be tantamount to helping impose a Communist government on the South.

Mr. Thieu opposes that unconditionally, believing that to compromise with the Communists is to be defeated by them.

And in recent months he has taken steps with the effect of hedging against the possibility that the Americans might some day concede more politically than they have already in offering, last January, to have him step down one month before internationally supervised, nationwide elections.

### His Measures Outlined

Since the North Vietnamese offensive began in late March, Mr. Thieu has taken these steps:

¶He has imposed martial law, allowing the national police to arrest suspected Communists or Communist sympathizers and detain or release them at will, without trial.

¶He has ruled by decree in the fields of national security and economy since the end of June.

¶He has closed all but two of Saigon's opposition newspapers by requiring publishers to deposit \$47,000 with the national treasury.

¶He has decreed that most officials of villages and hamlets should not be elected but be appointed by the province chiefs, who are military men appointed by the Government.

¶He has replaced all but two of the South Vietnamese Army's division commanders with his own men, many of whom are considered to be

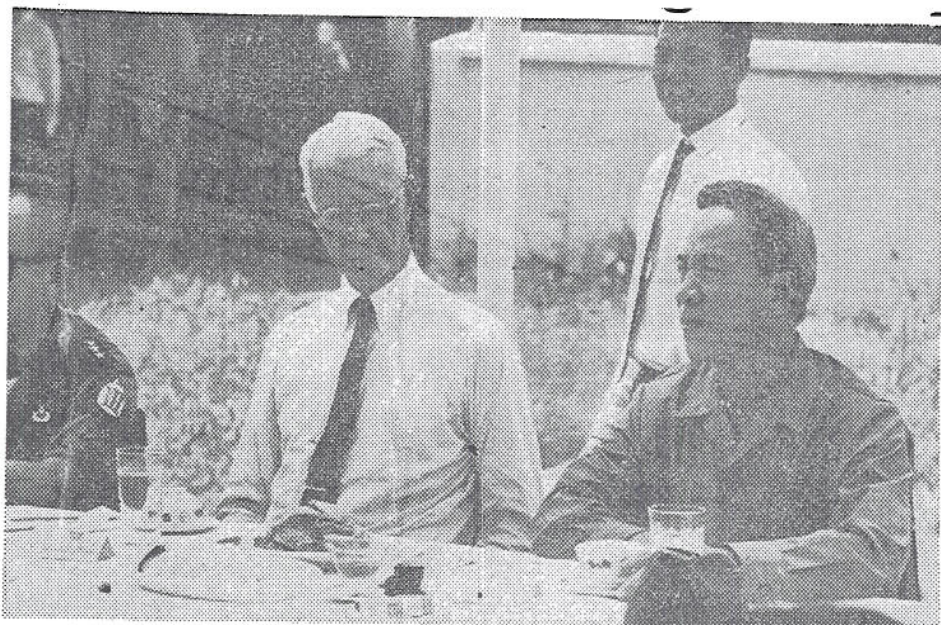
more competent leaders than their predecessors. The replacements have gone a long way toward eliminating the independent warlordism that used to hamper the authority of all Saigon administrations and that established Mr. Thieu, himself a former general, in indisputable control of the army.

¶He has increased the penalties for a variety of common crimes such as robbery, assault and hijacking, has placed most of them under the jurisdiction of special military courts and has threatened severe punishment for corrupt officials or those who try to bribe them.

### Accepted Fatalistically

Whatever the average Vietnamese citizen thinks of these measures—and there has been no organized or vocal opposition to them—the American establishment here regards some of them, such as the virtual closing down of the press, as “stupidly unnecessary,” as one official put it, but fatalistically accepts them.

“Talking about making him ‘broaden his political base’ is an American concept that has no relevance here,” one American said. American officials did not make such statements in the nineteen-sixties, when they were giving South Vietnam a democratic form of government and when they thought they needed the support of American public opinion.



The New York Times

Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker and President Thieu at an outdoor luncheon. Mr. Bunker is known to be disappointed with President Thieu's most recent actions.

President Thieu does not seem to think he needs such support. He appears convinced that President Nixon will be re-elected and will continue to support him. He makes little visible effort to win popularity among his people, nor does he often talk to the foreign press here. Last Wednesday he made some impromptu remarks to American and European reporters in Quangtri; it was the only time this year that he had granted an interview to resident correspondents.

Mr. Thieu said then: “I do not need to be a dictator.” But he clearly feels that for South Vietnam in the midst of a war, democracy is dangerous. He has achieved control, therefore, not by appeals to the electorate, but rather by careful and methodical placement of people of unquestioned loyalty to him in all the key positions of government.

### A Cousin Is Powerful

One of his most powerful advisers, for example, is 30-year-old Hoang Duc Nha. His title, press secretary and secretary to the president, is deceptive. He is a cousin of President Thieu and has had a hand in naming many high officials in the government—often friends or former classmates of his at the Lycée Yersin in Dalat, where he studied in the nineteen-fifties before going to the University of Pittsburgh in 1966.

Mr. Thieu was commandant of the Vietnamese military academy in Dalat at that time and adopted Mr. Nha as a sort of surrogate son. Mr. Nha's brother, Col. Hoang Duc Ninh, is commander of the 44th Special Zone in the Mekong Delta and is reliably reported to be on the promotion list to take over command of the army's Seventh Division soon.

The two other most powerful officials in the Government—Premier Tran Thien Khiem and Lieut. Gen. Dang Van Quang—were trusted associates of Mr. Thieu through his years in the army. Mr. Khiem and he were both company commanders in the French Army in the early nineteen-fifties. General Quang, the President's special assistant for military and security affairs, used to have a reputation for corruption but is believed to be the figure through whom Mr. Thieu has consolidated his mastery of the army.

“Khiem is described by everyone as one of Thieu's real friends, but I don't know how much real influence he has,” said one American official who follows Vietnamese political developments. Another man—a Vietnamese and a Cabinet officer—said recently: “Oh, no, that guy has no friends.”

### His Style Is Remote

Mr. Thieu's style of government is remote. He seldom makes a public appearance. He has, in the course of the offensive, made several visits to exposed field positions to raise the morale of his troops—acts of considerable courage for a man in his position. Wednesday, he even came under shelling during his visit to the Quangtri front. And on Friday he made a tour of the northern Mekong Delta area, where Communist pressure has also

been increasing in recent weeks.

But rarely does he venture among his civilian constituents or make a public speech. He waited for several weeks after the beginning of the enemy offensive last spring to proclaim a state of national emergency and to mobilize the population against the Communist attack, preferring instead to deal with the offensive more directly by issuing orders to field commanders by radio-telephone.

Seldom, either, has he expressed the philosophy that leads him to govern as he does, but in a speech on August 11, in Quinhon, he gave this exposition:

"The Communists dare to do everything," he said. "When I was young, in 1945, I went to the Maquis to co-operate with the Vietcong in resisting the French. I was deceived by them for several months. From that moment on, for 20 years, I have been fighting Communism.

#### 'There Is No Half Way'

"The Communists have only one dogma. We must follow them or die. There is no half way. There is no neutrality. If we concede territory to the Communists, we will lose it and the people. If we agree to a coalition government, our 17 million people will be forced to follow the Communists.

"If we adopt neutrality, Communist-style neutrality, this means that we will tie our own hands and let the Communists eat us. And if we allow the Communists to operate openly in South Vietnam, we will lose the country. Because I have carefully thought about these four ways of losing our country to the Communists, I have advanced my four no's policy.

"I will continue to defend my four no's until death."

By "four no's," Mr. Thieu means no neutrality, no coalition government, no concession of territory and no open operations by the Communists permitted in the South.

"Our Government has allowed us to enjoy too much democracy too soon," he continued. "Every freedom must be recognized to the extent consistent with the situation of our nation.

"If our country were a secure, peaceful and prosperous nation like the United States, all our democratic rights and freedoms could be fully observed without any trouble at all," he said. "But our country is still on the path of development, with the Communists blocking our way and interfering with all our activities. We can find the Communists everywhere, under our beds, under our ancestors' altar, behind our backs and even among our ranks."

#### Chau Still in Jail

Mr. Thieu has been merciless with nationalists whom he has suspected of dealing with the Communists or of trying to build a middle way. One of the best-known, a former officer of the House of Representatives—Tran Ngoc Chau—has been kept in jail on charges of collaborating with the Communists even though the special military court that tried him was declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court two years ago and his sentence was annulled.

His brother was identified as a Communist agent and Mr. Chau's crime was passing messages from him to the presidency.

A senior American adviser, the late John Paul Vann, called Mr. Chau "the greatest Vietnamese patriot I have ever known."

#### 'Gaps' in Democracy

"When an election is held," Mr. Thieu told his audience in

Quinhon, "the Communists try to benefit from it. Indeed, after a country becomes Communist, its people can never topple its Communist leaders. In the countries which are pro-Communist, in Africa and South America, if their armed forces are abreast of the situation and take timely action, they will be able to overthrow their leaders. In the South here our political parties are small and disunited, we are too complacent, and most important, our democracy is disorderly, it presents many gaps."

The reason Mr. Thieu is anxious to close those "gaps" at this time is that both he and his ineffectual opposition see the coming years as the final confrontation with the Communists, after which they expect either some sort of compromise or a concession of defeat by one side or the other.

"The closer we get to the end, the worse things look for us," said Ly Qui Chung. "We are getting close to the end, with the rapprochement of the great powers, but we can't continue the war this way. The United States can't continue to support a regime incapable of standing by itself."

#### 'Saving Its Energies'

Another opposition figure, Ho Nghoc Nhuan, said: "What we in the opposition—and we believe most of the people—want is the departure of Mr. Thieu. Unfortunately for us, that is what the 'other side' wants, too."

So because the opposition has no other way of bringing about the change it wants under a presidential system so completely controlled by Mr. Thieu, the opposition is lying low and saving its energies for the "post-Thieu" phase they believe will come one day. That, everyone agrees, is not any time soon. Mr. Thieu believes that the current fighting will go on at least through next year and that the only way to ultimate peace is by military victory on the battlefield.

In a speech in Hue on Wednesday, he said: "We strongly reaffirm that any peace solution should start with an end to armed aggression and the withdrawal of all Communist troops and cadres to the North. The army should keep up the initiative and develop the present victories to wipe out the enemy. We will be able to do it and we will achieve total victory."