

THIEU QUESTIONS U.S. COMMITMENT

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Speech Asking 'Relentless Bombing' Suggests Doubts on American Willingness

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SAIGON, South Vietnam, Aug. 13—President Nguyen Van Thieu, in a major speech, has said that to save South Vietnam, the United States must "keep up relentless bombing" of North Vietnam for another six or seven months, but at the same time he raised apparent doubts about Washington's willingness to go on bombing at the same intensity.

Though the speech was made nearly two weeks ago, its potential diplomatic and military impact received no international publicity at the time—largely because the Government issued only a synopsis and vaguely worded translation of the address, which was delivered in Vietnamese.

"There is only one way to force the Communists to negotiate seriously," President Thieu said in the key portion of the speech, "and that consists of the total destruction of their economic and war potentials. We must strike at them continuously, relentlessly, denying them any moment to catch their breath."

Then, on the issue of the firmness of the American commitment, he said: "So it all depends on the determination of our allies. If our allies are determined, peace will be restored in Indochina. If they lack determination, the Communists will revert to their half-guerrilla half-conventional warfare,

Continued on Page 10, Column 3

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U.S. Commitment Questioned by Thieu

Continued From Page 1, Col. 3

and the war will go on in Indochina forever."

Mr. Thieu said he thought another "six or seven months" of heavy bombing would be enough to destroy North Vietnam's economy and war machine and force Hanoi to accept a cease-fire with international guarantees over all of Indochina, not just in Vietnam.

At another point in the speech, the Saigon leader said that the North Vietnamese offensive, launched March 30, was aimed at creating "a stalemate" in the war that would cause President Nixon to lose his bid for re-election—"similar to the stalemate in 1968 for former President Johnson."

Then again raising the question of the American commitment, Mr. Thieu added, "Whether or not the Communists can achieve their objective, whether or not they can be successful in their dark attempt, will depend on the way the incumbent President deals with the problem."

It is not known if there is some difference of opinion between Saigon and Washington over continuing the bombing of North Vietnam at its present intense pitch. There has been no suggestion in the daily air-war communiqués that the number of strikes might be tapering off. Many foreign diplomats here think, therefore, that Mr. Thieu is simply worried that Mr. Nixon, in a bid for votes to insure his re-election, might relax or even halt the bombing to win some kind of localized cease fire before election day in November.

Terms for Cease-Fire

Mr. Thieu made clear in his speech, as he was in the past, that a cease-fire would have to include Laos and Cambodia—where the North Vietnamese maintain staging areas and supply routes—to be acceptable to his Government. He also insisted that a cease-fire would have to provide for effective international supervision.

The South Vietnamese President has also said that an unconditional bombing halt would be "suicide" for Saigon, citing as evidence the bombing halt ordered by President Johnson in 1968, which he said allowed the North Vietnamese to build up supplies for the invasion they began four and a half months ago.

Mr. Thieu's speech, signifi-

cant both for its extreme hard-line tone and its questions about Washington's support, was given in Vietnamese at a graduation ceremony Aug. 1 at the National Defense College in Saigon—the equivalent of the United States National War College in Washington, D.C., for senior officers who are usually headed for promotion to general.

Speech in Vietnamese

It was a prestigious function, with foreign diplomats and other dignitaries present—including Ellsworth Bunker, the American Ambassador, and Gen. Frederick C. Weyand, the commander of American forces in Vietnam.

The President spoke from notes rather than a text, and the simultaneous English translation for foreigners was largely a paraphrased summary. The foreigners departed as one diplomat put it, "not terribly clear about what he had said."

The government news agency then also issued a synopsis, which noted Mr. Thieu's call for continued bombings but missed the questions about the United States commitment and thus missed the speech's broader implications.

A few days later, the Presidential Palace provided verbatim Vietnamese transcripts of the speech, made from a tape recording, and foreign embassies then picked these up and did the translating themselves. The New York Times—when it learned there was more to the speech than had appeared in the government news agency report—acquired a copy and translated it.

Embassy Won't Comment

The American Embassy has declined to comment on the speech. Privately, American sources say their impression is that the speech was primarily for local consumption and that its hard-line tone was tailored for its Vietnamese audience in general and its military audience at the Defense College in particular, and was therefore not surprising. The Americans also saw nothing unusual in the questions raised about Washington's commitment, viewing these as part of the speech's call for a maximum effort against the Communists.

Further, the Americans suggest that if President Thieu wanted to address himself to Washington, he would not choose a semiextemporaneous

speech as his vehicle. "If it was an attempt to get something across to the Nixon Administration, it wasn't very effectively done," said one American source.

However, other Western diplomats here do not agree with the Americans. They view the speech as a major one, its main thrust aimed at Washington.

Reliable Vietnamese sources confirm this view. They say President Thieu definitely wanted the import to "filter out" to the Americans.

As to why Mr. Thieu chose his indirect method of conveying his views, these sources—who are close to the Presidential Palace—point out that at this sensitive stage in relations between Washington and Saigon, with the United States phasing out its physical presence here and the South Vietnamese assuming the entire burden of ground combat, South Vietnamese officials sometimes find it easier to convey their strong views by roundabout means.