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Nixon Men Seen Pressing Thieu

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PRESIDENT THIEU of South Vietnam is squealing with pain as President Nixon's emissaries twist the arms behind his back, in an attempt to push him into a deal with the North.

In speech after speech, he insists that "No one has the right to interfere" in South Vietnam's internal affairs by imposing a solution—and he makes it clear that the interference comes from the United States.

"No one has the right to negotiate, bargain, or accept any solution" in the talks with the Communists, he insists, except his own government.

Since the only other party now "negotiating" with the Communists is the United States, Thieu is, in effect, telling Mr. Nixon where he gets off.

Thieu is telling Mr. Nixon in public what he is no doubt saying more forcefully in private to the President's emissaries, such as Dr. Kissinger last month and Gen. Alexander M. Haig this month.

The Vietnamese people, he reminds Mr. Nixon, will always remember with "loathing" the betrayal of their interests by France, in a previous peace settlement, when it "colluded with the Communists to sell Vietnam at a cheap price in 1954." Could Thieu really be imputing any such intention to Mr. Nixon? Administration officials say that Thieu's words should be accepted at their face value.

BUT WHEN HE SAYS, in the very next sentence, that he will accept a peace based on justice, while opposing "every deed or word" that would help the Communists to impose "a dark and vile political solution" on the South, he can obviously not be talking about the French. They are in no position whatever even to try to impose any kind of solution on the South. The only power in a position to "impose" a solution is the United States. In saying that he will "punish" any one who tries to do anything of the kind, Thieu is in fact threatening to upset Mr. Nixon's applecart just before the election, as he upset the Johnson-Humphrey plans just before the last election when he refused to join the Paris talks.

He is thus taking a leaf

out of Hanoi's book, for the North Vietnamese too have been trying to use the presidential election to strengthen their own bargaining position. They have denounced Mr. Nixon as "Tricky Dick," and now Thieu has, in effect, warned the White House that he is familiar with this view of the President's character, and that he does not intend to be sold down the river.

But what he does not appear to have taken into account is that Mr. Nixon, forewarned by the Johnson-Humphrey episode, would have taken full precautions against being stabbed in the back at the last moment by the man who suspects that he might be stabbed first.

MR. NIXON, who has managed to get around the Kremlin and Mao Tse-tung, and to ditch the Chiang Kai-shek regime in the process, is not going to let a man like Thieu stand in his way. If worse comes to worst, he can find a way to ditch Thieu and thus increase his electoral support even further at the cost of Senator McGovern—who, after all, could hardly criticize such a move.

THIEU'S SPEECHES also come close to revealing some of the terms of the settlement the United States is pressing on him. He is warning Washington against stopping the bombing in exchange for a cease-fire in Vietnam only, instead of including Cambodia and Laos as well. If the United States stops the bombing without demanding a Communist withdrawal in all Indochina, "We will fall again into the same vicious circle."

He keeps insisting that "We are not afraid of a cease-fire, nor are we evading it," which means that he is being privately told by the United States that this is just what he is doing.

He says that the Communists are acting as if they would agree to a peace settlement "within a day or two," but he warns Washington that this is only a trick designed "to separate the United States and us."

To judge from his own words, the trick is succeeding—if it is a trick.