

NYTimes NOV 8 1972

Thieu's Opposition

Reports Contacts

by Vietcong Aides

Overtures Believed
Linked to Truce
Preparation and
Future Political
Battle

Recipients Are Wary

Vietcong Cite
Readiness to Talk
With All Forces in
Bid to Restore Peace

By CRAIG R. WHITNEY

Special to The New York Times

SAIGON, South Vietnam, Nov. 7—Agents of the National Liberation Front have initiated several contacts in recent weeks with members of Saigon's anti-Government, non-Communist opposition, apparently in preparation for a cease-fire and the coming political struggle, according to opposition sources here.

The sources, who asked not to be identified because of the dangers of even talking about contacts with the Communists here, said that they feared the overtures might lead to "slow disintegration" of the Nationalist political spectrum here because there has been no corresponding opening to the opposition from the Government side.

"We are living out a drama," said one of the men with knowledge of the contacts, a prominent figure well known to foreigners and Vietnamese here. "They are coming to certain of our people in Saigon and saying: 'We recognize you as men worthy of respect. We must work together.'"

Preliminary Moves

The contacts do not seem to have been more involved than that so far and were preliminary in nature, the sources say. But, one added: "In the past, such attempts at contact were usually refused out of hand. Now, with the new situation, there is a greater tendency to go along with it."

The intentions of the Communists are so far not clear. But on Nov. 5, the radio of the National Liberation Front, or Vietcong, broadcast a statement that said, "The South Vietnam National Liberation Front and allied forces are

ready to get in touch and hold talks with all forces, political and religious organizations, all individuals at home and abroad, even those in the Saigon army and administration, aspiring to peace and national concord, together to end the war soon and restore peace on the basis of the agreement."

What bothered one informed politician about the fact that the "other side," as it is always circumspectly referred to in Saigon, has begun making approaches to certain opposition figures is that the opposition is paralyzed, vis-a-vis President Thieu and vis-a-vis the Communists.

"So any movement like this can only benefit the side that makes the contact first," he said.

Indeed, Saigon's opposition figures have so far been unable to profit from the new political conditions that have been created by the imminence of a peace settlement. They cannot unite in disagreement with President Nguyen Van Thieu this time, but they cannot bring themselves to join

Continued on Page 68, Column 2

in supporting his opposition to the peace pact either.

Opposition leaders interviewed over the last two weeks blame both the Americans and Mr. Thieu himself. They say that the President has made no serious attempt to consult them or enable them to participate in the political process, and they say that the Americans, fearing disorder, have not yet given any sign that they are willing to consider backing someone as an alternative to Mr. Thieu.

Even though the relationship between the United States Government and President Thieu was drastically altered by the visit of Henry A. Kissinger last month on the delicate mission of describing the peace settlement to Mr. Thieu and trying to persuade him to accept it, the fundamental policy of American support for his Government has not changed and would not be required to change under the terms of the agreement, which permits him to stay on after a cease-fire.

As the broad spectrum of fractionalized opposition movements here sees it, Mr. Thieu represents only a small part of South Vietnamese political life—the extreme right. Nobody else is permitted to have an active role, and the President, distrustful of democratic processes, has suspended them and ruled largely by decree since the beginning of the North Vietnamese offensive last spring.

Now that a peace settlement may be near, they believe, Mr. Thieu will have to accept whatever the Americans and the North Vietnamese work out.

The principal opposition leaders here include the Southern Catholics, led by such men as the Senate chairman, Nguyen Van Huyen, Buddhists led by Senator Vu Van Mau and inspired by the retired general Duong Van Minh and opposition deputies under Tran Van Tuyen, a lawyer. They have the same fears about certain provisions of the draft accord as Mr. Thieu has expressed. These fears about the nature and power of the proposed National Council of Reconciliation and Concord and about a cease-fire that would leave more than 145,000 North Vietnamese troops in place in

South Vietnam have left the opposition largely paralyzed.

It cannot attack Mr. Thieu too strongly because it shares his position on the agreement. But it continues to oppose his monopoly of political power in the Government, which leaves it with no channel to express its opposition or make it effective, and it wishes he would step down in favor of some kind of collective leadership.

A Lone Supporter

The sole prominent figure who has publicly expressed willingness to accept the terms of the present draft accord is a Southern Catholic deputy, Ho Ngoc Nhuan, who said in an interview, "It is far from a settlement that will end our differences and bring about peace, but it is time to end the bloodshed. We simply must stop the fighting and take our chances after that, and this settlement seems to be the best way of doing it."

None of the opposition figures interviewed believes that Mr. Thieu will block the draft agreement entirely. "He is demanding a whole lot more than he has any chance of getting in hopes of getting out of it a little more than what's in it now," Mr. Nhuan said.

Most of the opposition leaders, including General Minh, fear that after a "cease-fire in place," the Communists will take advantage of the American troop withdrawal to launch new attacks or a campaign of terrorism to extend political control gradually.

The result of all this has been that the balance of forces among the non-Communist ranks between the Government and the opposition has not changed. Few in the opposition believe that a peace settlement will be workable unless it does. "We must have a liberation of all the forces that have been suppressed and contained by the Government before we can have any kind of national reconciliation," said Ho Van Minh, an influential supporter of General Minh. "We should have collective leadership and show the other side that we have concord among ourselves before we can hope to work together with them."