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Thieu Set To Extend Power

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SAIGON, Dec. 8—President Thieu is expected to request next week that his authority to rule South Vietnam by decree be extended both in time and in scope.

The announcement today that the president would address the National Assembly Tuesday—something he has not done in two years—touched off immediate speculation that he had something decisive to say about the Paris peace negotiations. It had been suggested earlier in political circles here that Thieu would go before the Assembly when he had the final text of a proposed agreement and would ask the legislators to vote on it.

Reliable Vietnamese and Western sources, however, said today that while Thieu is expected to allude to the progress of the talks, it is unlikely that he will reveal any details or present any new issues. His main purpose, these sources said, will be to convince the National Assembly that it should extend and perhaps expand his authority to rule by fiat.

Last June, after an extensive legislative squabble, the Assembly gave Thieu the right to rule outside the legislative process for six months on matters of security and economics. Thieu never appeared personally in support of that request, a fact that many legislators resented, and the bill was passed by the Senate only when Thieu's supporters staged a session of questionable legality to push it through.

That authorization expires Dec. 28. Thieu said publicly in September that he would not ask to have it renewed, but that was before there was any prospect of a cease-fire or total U.S. withdrawal.

Diplomatic sources said it is also possible that Thieu will ask that the decree powers be broadened to give him a free hand in what one analyst called "matters of war and peace" as well as in military and economic matters.

Thieu has used the authority he gained last June to levy new taxes, restrict the press, clamp down on political opposition and expand the draft. His decision to seek an extension is something of a surprise. As recently as last week members of his Cabinet were preparing new last minute decrees in anticipation of the expiration of the special powers law.

Vietnamese legislative sources said it is likely that the president will get whatever he asks for next week. The man who was most effective in delaying the original bill, Senate president Nguyen Van Huyen, is on record as supporting Thieu in the current situation, and as one member of the lower house said tonight, "This isn't the time for democracy."

Thieu has been moving on several fronts to strengthen his hand for the anticipated political struggle against the Communists that would follow a cease-fire.

He has pushed the organization of his own nationwide political party, sent military officers into the countryside to bolster the civilian administration at village and hamlet level, launched a fullscale propaganda campaign against the provisions of the draft agreement between Hanoi and Washington and sought to give the impression that his government is firmly entrenched. A request for extension of his decree powers, which he reportedly will seek for a three-month period, would be in line with those far from conciliatory policies.