

# Thieu's Speech Is Viewed As Bid for Better Terms

NYTimes By FOX BUTTERFIELD DEC 13 1972  
Special to The New York Times

SAIGON, South Vietnam, Dec. 12—President Nguyen Van Thieu's call for a Christmas truce and an exchange of prisoners left many South Vietnamese and American officials here today with the impression that Mr. Thieu was once more trying to forestall a cease-fire accord he dislikes by offering new terms of his own.

But in his rambling and often imprecise speech to the National Assembly, President Thieu did not specifically reject the peace settlement worked out by Hanoi and Washington. And some experienced Vietnamese politicians felt they even detected a subtle signal that Mr. Thieu is now ready to accede reluctantly to an agreement that he realizes he cannot stop.

Whatever Mr. Thieu meant—and there were almost as many interpretations in Saigon as there were listeners—most knowledgeable diplomats felt that in any case the speech would probably have little effect on the secret talks in Paris.

## Smile and Forget

"The negotiators will smile and shake their heads and tomorrow the speech will all be forgotten," remarked one diplomat who believes that a settlement in Paris is imminent.

The 55-minute address in the squat, white Senate building on the bank of the Saigon River seemed to be divided into two separate parts: a tough, hard-line summary of South Vietnam's objections to the draft peace accord, and a conciliatory proposal at the very end calling for a truce and exchange of prisoners.

The tough language was widely believed to be for domestic consumption, while the offer of a truce, to begin before Christmas and extend to New Year's, with the possibility of being continued indefinitely, was designed to show Americans that Mr. Thieu was not the obstacle to peace. Significantly, the Vietnamese Foreign Ministry had prepared an English translation of only the conciliatory section.

## P.O.W. Release Offered

"To show its utmost goodwill," President Thieu said, "the Republic of Vietnam will unilaterally release 1,015 North Vietnamese disabled and healthy prisoners of war on the first day of the truce." And to help secure the release of American prisoners, he added, Saigon would be willing to free all North Vietnamese military prisoners if Hanoi re-

sponded. He made no mention of political prisoners, whose release the Communists have been demanding.

Along with the truce and the exchange of military prisoners, Mr. Thieu called for "consultations to discuss every problem of mutual concern" between Saigon, Hanoi and the National Liberation Front.

Since his proposal did not call for withdrawal of North Vietnamese troops from South Vietnam—long Saigon's chief demand in the Paris talks—some Vietnamese saw it as a major concession indicating that Mr. Thieu would accede to the draft agreement.

But others here felt that Mr. Thieu's offer was irrelevant, coming as it did after most major points had apparently already been agreed on in Paris. They viewed the proposal as only an attempt to sidetrack the current negotiations.

## Delaying Action Seen

"It's a delaying tactic again," said Tran Van Tuyen, a leading Opposition deputy. "Thieu is saying yes and no at the same time. His proposals will raise a whole lot of new questions, but I'm afraid it is now already too late for this stalling tactic to work."

In two speeches at the end of October President Thieu had similarly left his audience uncertain about his exact position by making vague, contradictory statements and by introducing new peace proposals. In one speech for example, on Oct. 27 at the Presidential Palace, Mr. Thieu suggested a referendum sponsored by the United Nations

to determine the future composition of the government in Saigon, a proposal to which he alluded again today.

Mr. Thieu, dressed in a dark blue business suit, spent most of his time today attacking the proposed peace accord.

"After forcing us to sign this agreement and after achieving the so-called expulsion of Americans from Vietnam," he said, "the annexation of South Vietnam through military means will be only a question of time."

Mr. Thieu repeatedly referred to what he termed the "two life-and-death issues" for South Vietnam, namely that all North Vietnamese troops must be withdrawn from the South, and that the proposed National Council of Reconciliation and Concord would impose "a disguised coalition government" on Saigon.

## 'Cunning, Crafty Trick'

He charged that the draft ac-

cord left both of these issues unresolved, and he called the settlement a "cunning, crafty trick."

But Mr. Thieu never said South Vietnam would not ac-

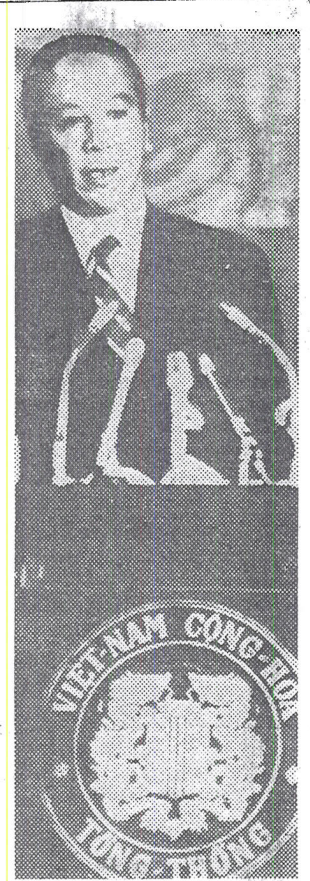
cept the accord. He appeared to be trapped by his continuing dependence on the United States, and by his knowledge that if he finally rejected the peace agreement, he might stand to lose his sole source of support.

Thus some Vietnamese reasoned, Mr. Thieu threw up a torrent of criticism of the accord to give vent to his own feelings but stopped short of a rejection.

"He shouted no, but he whispered yes," one Vietnamese politician remarked.

President Thieu did not announce a change in his Cabinet today, as many people had expected him to, but the official Vietnam Press Bulletin disclosed that Mr. Thieu's new secret political party, the Democracy party, would be made public this week.

This party, which reportedly has over 100,000 members, includes almost all province, district, village and hamlet officials. It is the instrument Mr. Thieu hopes will enable him to compete with the Communists after a cease-fire.



Associated Press

President Nguyen Van Thieu speaking yesterday in Saigon.