



NGUYEN VAN THIEU

... 'When I say no, it's no.'

Thieu Says 'No' to Terms Of October

By Laurence Stern

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South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu, in an extraordinarily blunt interview two weeks ago, said he would never accept a peace formula based on last October's Henry A. Kissinger-Le Duc Tho draft agreement. He also advocated a ground invasion of North Vietnam, should current negotiation efforts break down.

Thieu also made public his version of the conversations last October in Saigon with President Nixon's national security adviser, Kissinger, which preceded the temporary deadlock of the talks and intensified U.S. bombing of Hanoi and Haiphong.

The South Vietnam president delivered his terms for settlement of the war along with criticism of U.S. negotiation policies in an interview held in Saigon Dec. 30 with Italian journalist Oriana Fallaci. It is being published in full in the forthcoming issue of New Republic magazine.

By a coincidence of timing, the Thieu interview was released for publication on the day Kissinger and North Viet-

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nam Politburo member Le Duc Tho interrupted their recent round of negotiations amid speculation that some form of new agreement had been reached.

In the interview, Thieu charged that the two "fundamental principals" of the October draft agreement between Washington and Hanoi were conceived by the Communists and would have meant "the end of South Vietnam." These elements were acceptance of a North Vietnamese troop presence in South Vietnam and inclusion of the Vietcong in a Saigon political settlement.

"What I maintain is that we'll never accept such a formula, no matter how well dis-

guised," Thieu declared. He said he told Kissinger last October:

"Dr. Kissinger, in doing so (accepting the presence of the North Vietnamese troops) you put the legal government of South Vietnam in the position of a puppet government installed by the Americans."

Thieu characterized his conversations with Kissinger as "very frank indeed. At moments, I could say, they were very hard. However they were also friendly . . . Mademoiselle, I have said 'no' to the Americans. What else do you want? When I say no, it's no."

He introduced the subject of invading North Vietnam with ground troops while criticizing the "gradualism" of President Lyndon Johnson's war policies.

"Until today we have had half a war. I say, had we attacked North Vietnam with classical war, had we bombed North Vietnam continuously, had we landed in North Vietnam, the war would be over by now.

"As a military man I say that if peace fails and we want to end this war, we must bring the war to North Vietnam. In all possible ways, including landing."

Asked by Miss Fallaci if he thought landing troops in the North was still a possible step, Thieu responded: "Why not, if the Americans want it? If it isn't possible for the Americans, it isn't possible for anybody."

He went on to say that "should we ever land in North Vietnam, the great majority

would rebel against its government."

Thieu criticized both President Nixon and Kissinger for having been "too impatient to get a peace, too impatient to negotiate and sign. When you negotiate with the Communists, you shouldn't fix a deadline. You must not tell them that you want to repatriate the prisoners as soon as possible. . . ."

On the prisoner question, Thieu said: ". . . The Americans have shown too much concern for their 500 prisoners in Hanoi, and now the North Vietnamese use them as some merchandise to impose political conditions on us. It's disgusting."

Thieu said he is ready to exchange 10,000 North Vietnamese military and additional ci-

vilian prisoners for 500 captured American pilots "when the war is over, not before." In this respect the views of the South Vietnam President sharply diverged from those expressed last week by retiring Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird, who spoke of the return of the American prisoners as the last step toward U.S. military disengagement from the war.

Thieu spoke chidingly of Kissinger's policies of global realpolitik. ". . . His strategic conception of the world is very smart: a Southeast Asia controlled by the Russians . . . to control and contain China. Russians are less dangerous than the Chinese, so it's necessary to ask the Russians to contain the Chinese . . . Tres bon . . . A little Viet-

namese doesn't play with a strategic map of the world."

Thieu said that he told Kissinger last October: "To be or not to be. This is the problem for us."

The South Vietnam President said he would settle for nothing less than separate, sovereign statehood for North and South Vietnam. "Like Germany," he said. "Like Korea . . . When reunification will come, only God knows. Personally I don't believe that it will come before 20 years or so."

He added that in Saigon last month he raised the specter of a post-war bloodbath with Kissinger. "I told him: 'Would we have fought 18 years, would we have sacrificed hundreds of thousands of soldiers and civilians in order to have one million heads cut off?'"