

Thieu Acts to Open Talks With Vietcong Next Week

NYTimes

By JOSEPH B. TREASTER FEB 3 1973
Special to The New York Times

SAIGON, South Vietnam, Saturday, Feb. 3—President Nguyen Van Thieu announced today that he had ordered a senior diplomat to begin talks in Paris with the Vietcong on the political future of South Vietnam.

In a radio and television address beginning at midnight, as colored flares welcoming the Lunar New Year lit up the quiet sky, Mr. Thieu declared that this was the first peaceful Tet holiday in 18 years.

Nevertheless he reiterated Government charges that the Communists had violated the cease-fire more than 1,300 times since it began nearly a week ago. He denied reports that Saigon's forces also had violated the cease-fire, saying, "As in the past it is the Communists who have violated the truce."

The chief delegates to the Four-Party Joint Military Commission charged with monitoring the cease-fire held their first formal meeting yesterday. [Page 30.]

In his speech, Mr. Thieu said he had directed Pham Dan Lam, who was head of the South Vietnamese delegation to the Paris talks, to contact the Vietcong when the Lunar New Year holiday ends early next week.

But he said he thought the Communists would want to delay talks with the Saigon Government because "they want to

for immediate talks between the Saigon Government and the Vietcong on the setting up of a National Council of National Reconciliation and Concord, which will organize elections, and says they should sign an

agreement on the internal matters of South Vietnam—if possible within 90 days of the start of the cease-fire.

Cities to Be Rebuilt

Mr. Thieu, wearing a formal mandarin gown and traditional headband, talked of eliminating corruption in the Government, saying that with the end of the war there could be no excuse for the old malpractices.

He also outlined an ambitious program to rebuild the ruined cities of South Vietnam and to return the more than one million refugees to their homes. The program, he said, would begin in the first six months of this year.

"This is the first peaceful New Year in 18 years," Mr. Thieu said, adding: "We must thank the dead that we are still alive and that our country is still existing. We fervently pray for peace to return, and that it will be a real peace."

The number of Communist violations of the cease-fire charged by the Saigon Government has been declining steadily and reliable American and South Vietnamese sources say they believe that South Vietnam is steadily moving closer to a real truce.

A well-informed Government official, a retired army general, said in an interview yesterday, "In 10 days or two weeks everything will be more quiet."

"You cannot stop all the incidents," the official asserted, "but if there are some incidents they will be very small."

This view appeared to be supported by a Government spokesman, who said that there had been 23 Communist violations of the cease-fire between 6 A.M. and noon yesterday—the lowest number for that six-

four period since the cease-fire officially went into effect last Sunday.

For each of the two previous full days the Government had reported about 200 Communist violations, or fewer than half as many as were reported on the first day of the cease-fire.

American analysts have maintained that the number of incidents is not as significant as their magnitude and they say that this has been declining steadily.

Altogether the Government has reported 1,357 Communist violations of the cease-fire since Sunday.

Hanoi's Statement

The Communists have leveled no specific countercharges. But in a statement broadcast over the Hanoi radio last night, the Foreign Ministry of North Vietnam asserted that Saigon's forces "continuing their military activities to nibble at many areas" under the control of the Vietcong. The statement reaffirmed Hanoi's position of "strictly and fully carrying out all the provisions of the agreement on ending the war and restoring peace in Vietnam."

American officers in the far North of South Vietnam said that serious fighting was continuing in battle-scarred Quang Tri Province and in the southern part of Quang Ngai Province near the coast.

But they added that the 65 miles or so of Route 1 between the provincial capital of Quang Ngai city and Da Nang, South Vietnam's second largest city, had been opened in the last two

days and that light traffic was flowing over it.

One officer who drove the road on Thursday said he had seen "a hell of lot of South Vietnamese flags" along the way. He said that no Communist flags had been reported flying in any of the major cities in the region.

The Government spokesman said that three key roads — Routes 14 and 19 in the Central Highlands and Route 20 leading from Dalat, at the Southern edge of the highlands, to Saigon—remained unsafe for general use.

Other officers, reported, however, that a convoy of trucks carrying vegetables from the

fields around Dalat had reached Saigon Thursday, Relieving somewhat the food shortage that had been developed in the capital.

Discussing the cease-fire yesterday, a group of veteran army officers said that Government troop morale so far seemed to be much better than immediately after the cease-fire that began after the Geneva conference in 1954.

A senior officer said that he had heard of only one group of about 48 militiamen defecting to the other side. In 1954, he said, whole battalions of Vietnamese soldiers who had fought with the French went over to the Vietminh.

get more land and more people for a general election in the future."

Nevertheless Mr. Thieu said, "We should force the Communists to negotiate in order to have a political solution as soon as possible."

The agreement signed in Paris last Saturday calls

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