

Thieu -- I'll Never Ask for Troops

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Washington

President Nguyen Van Thieu of South Vietnam pledged yesterday—in his first American public appearance—that he would “never, never” ask the U.S. to send troops back to Vietnam.

In a speech and then a news conference at the National Press Club, Thieu also said that his government could survive after the cease-fire period without American air support, even if the North Vietnamese began a fresh invasion.

Backed by promises of continued American economic and military aid from two days of talks with President Nixon on the West Coast, Thieu seemed relaxed and in good humor as he faced his first American audience — made up of newsmen, diplomats, government officials, public relations men and businessmen who are members of the club.

The South Vietnamese leader met tough questions with aplomb, and went out of his way to say what Most Americans were probably eager to hear.

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South Vietnam needs economic aid now, he said, but will soon be self-sufficient; he said he did not fear the Communist military power and his army could fight its own battles; he believed firmly in democracy, he said, and has put no “political prisoners” in jail — only common criminals and some 500 “Communist agents.”

He said he is ready to send these “agents” to the North if the Communists would only release the 67,504 South Vietnamese local offi-



AP Wirephoto

PRESIDENT THIEU He met the press

cial he said were in their custody.

Later in the day he went to Capitol Hill for meetings with the leadership of both houses of Congress. And he held short sessions with Robert S. McNamara, president of the World Bank, and union leaders.

Some of Thieu's most outspoken critics in the past have been on Capitol Hill, but yesterday his charm seemed to work as effective-

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ly with Congress as it did with the press club audience.

He met for an hour with about 25 House leaders and, according to representative Wayne L. Hays (Dem - Ohio), he was “most forthright” in answering questions. Speaker Carl Albert said Thieu was “a very able man, soft-spoken, but obviously with a lot of steel in him.”

Thieu then met privately for a half-hour with senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield, and Republican leader Hugh Scott, and then went to a reception attended by about 60 senators.

It was clear that Thieu had given considerable thought to his Press Club appearance, which was broadcast live by national public radio, a noncommercial network.

Aware of the many Americans who have spoken harshly of him and his government, he sought to meet the criticism directly.

“I simply want you to know that as Vietnamese, we fully realize that many among you were skeptical about or even questioned the wisdom of the American involvement in Vietnam and quite often were critical of our shortcomings,” he said.

“We respect your opinion,” he went on, “but for us, the truth remains that you came to help us in time of danger, you kept your word to a small nation even when the going was rough and you kept it till the day an acceptable arrangement could be found to terminate the war. For this, we Vietnamese cannot but express our sincere and deeply felt gratitude, which I hope you will convey to the American people.”