

# The Drive Against Thieu: It Began When 'Peace' Came

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Special to The New York Times

SAIGON, South Vietnam, Nov. 3.—The opposition to President Nguyen Van Thieu which has just begun to take to the streets, did not materialize overnight.

**News Analysis**  
It has been building during the 21 months of disillusion, economic decline and war that have followed the signing of the Paris peace agreements.

Though Mr. Thieu is now being attacked for the corruption and repressiveness of his regime, he is, at bottom, being blamed for presiding over non-Communist South Vietnam at a time when things have gone from bad to very bad.

And as they look to the future, many informed Vietnamese have concluded rightly or wrongly that whatever government holds power in Saigon in Saigon will not much longer be able to afford Mr. Thieu's policy of uncompromising military confrontation with the Communists.

### Different View of U.S.

Over the years many South Vietnamese, perhaps most have come to believe that the United States is the arbiter of their destiny. When they perceive that their small nation is no longer the pivot of Washington's foreign policy, when they see the American Congress halve South Vietnam's military appropriation, when they hear Mr. Thieu denounce his closest ally for betrayal of a supposed pledge of support—they draw their own conclusions.

"Now the United States and others are talking about 'national reconciliation and concord,'" observed an anti-Com-

munist country parish priest who led thousands of Roman Catholics out of North Vietnam 20 years ago. "These are the words of the times." Again, in the perception of Vietnamese, the Nixon resignation in August was a stunning blow to Mr. Thieu.

It did not matter that, objectively, Gerald R. Ford was probably better able to help Saigon with what it needed most—money, Richard M. Nixon had stood by Nguyen Van Thieu for five years; their destinies were seen to be intertwined.

### U.S. Support Reaffirmed

To be sure, the Americans have not abandoned Mr. Thieu and there is no evidence that they have been manipulating his opponents. On the contrary, Ambassador Graham A. Martin has pledged firm support to the Government the South Vietnamese people "have freely chosen, in their struggle against the cruel North Vietnamese aggression."

When asked, as they now frequently are, American diplomats tell Vietnamese seeking to read the weather, that Washington supports Mr. Thieu because he was elected President in 1971; if someone else is legally chosen in his stead, it will then support him.

There is a bit of fiction in all this, since Mr. Thieu, when re-elected, was running against no one, and not many Vietnamese believe that fresh Presidential elections in October, 1975, will lead them out of the present impasse. But as long as the continues to be the actual as well as the official American position, Mr. Thieu is generally given a chance of serving the part of his effort to defuse the

opposition, he is ending his speeches with ambiguous hints that he is considering not running for a third term next October.

The next 12 months promise to be turbulent. Abroad, South Vietnam seems to have the image of a monolithic police state, but there is still an astonishing degree of violent criticism of the Government. A loose coalition of Catholics, Buddhists, journalists, veterans' groups, lawyers' associations and South Vietnam's largest labor union is having its innings.

### Role of Catholics

The opposition is still without a demonstrable mass base, but so is Mr. Thieu, who must rely almost exclusively on the army and police for support. Members of his Democracy party are passing out copies of self-justifying documents they furnished the President fully a year ago, warning that he would have to act against corruption and inefficiency in his administration. Ten days ago, he jettisoned his unpopular cousin, Information Minister Hoang Duc Nha, and he now is having trouble replacing him.

The Catholic opposition began a year ago with a series of seminars and innocuous-sounding pastoral letters on the subject of social vices, particularly corruption. At a time when the Vatican itself was wrestling with the question of the future role of the Italian Communist party in a possible coalition with the Christian Democrats, some Vietnamese clerics felt it was high time that the church put some distance between itself and Mr. Thieu.

When a Redemptorist priest, the Rev. Tran Huu Thanh, was given a mandate to act on the seminar's conclusions, few look notice. On June 18, when a group of 301 priests issued a blistering indictment of the Government at the Tan Sa Chau church on the edge of Saigon, only two foreign correspondents were able to penetrate the police barriers. Father Thanh now acknowledges that the polemic by the 301 priests was the "covering" he needed to launch his anti-corruption campaign, which quickly turned into a movement to oust Mr. Thieu. The corruption issue cuts to the heart of Mr. Thieu's prob-

lem. When the Americans were here, corruption was tolerable; the fat came off Uncle Sam, not the average Vietnamese. Today, South Vietnam has the third or fourth highest rate of inflation in the world. Life has become extremely difficult. The long-institutionalized well of corruption—most important positions are believed to have their price—affects the dwindling incomes of ordinary Vietnamese.

And the war goes on, at a frightful pace. Since the 1973 cease-fire, the Government says, its forces have suffered 24,752 killed, 101,248 wounded and 13,214 missing.