

HONOLULU CONFERENCE

JULY 1968

STATEMENT OF PRESIDENT NGUYEN VAN THIEU

AT THE JOINT WORKING SESSION

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~~This is the thrid time~~ This is the ~~thrid~~ ^{two} time in three years ~~that the~~ Government leaders of our two countries meet in the Pacific to review our common efforts, in the framework of our common purposes in the face of Communist aggression in Vietnam. This year, the conference has a special significance in view of exploratory talks in Paris and the recent Communist offensives in South Vietnam.

In February 1966, when we met for the first time in Honolulu, our two Governments jointly expressed our determination in the defense against Communist aggression, our dedication to the hopes of all the people of South Vietnam, and our commitment to the search for a just and durable peace.

At that time, South Vietnam was in an unstable period, and the provisional government under the National Leadership Committee, was less than one year old.

We are convinced then, as we are now, that Communist aggression and expansion cannot be allowed to go unchecked, because otherwise we can have at best only a respite, not a genuine, durable peace. On the other hand, we know that the Communist challenge is not only a military one, it is also a political challenge. Behind the shield of military defense, we, the Vietnamese, must build a strong and progressive society as a viable and attractive alternative to Communism.

That is why, at our first Conference here in 1966, the Government of the Republic of Vietnam set forth these 4 following purposes:

1. The defeat of the Viet-Cong.
2. The eradication of social injustice and the building of a modern society in which every man can know that he has a future.
3. The establishment of a viable, stable and progressing economy.
4. The building of true democracy for our land and our people.

A few months after the first Honolulu Conference, while the Communist aggressors continued their relentless pressures, the Republic of Vietnam encountered in the Summer of 1966 violent internal upheavals which seriously menaced the perspectives of an orderly democratic society. With American unfailing support, the Republic of Vietnam weathered through these storms and met this double challenge.

In the midst of the war, we organized elections for a Constituent Assembly to draft a Constitution for the new Republic, promulgated in April 1967.

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In the framework of the Constitution, presidential elections were held, as well as nation-wide elections for a Senate and Lower House of the National Assembly. At the same time, elections were held at the local level, throughout the country, for the revival of the village councils which made the strength of traditional Vietnam, and which recalled the fact that popular participation in public affairs was not unknown in our history, for many thousand years.

Thus, one of the major goals pursued by the Government of Vietnam has been reached, in terms of the establishment of the structure for constitutional democracy in facing the Communist challenge.

In our efforts to build a better society in South Vietnam, the GVN has paid special attention to the eradication of corruption. A large number of corrupt and inefficient administrators and civil servants have been replaced. We look forward to the establishment of a healthy and effective administrative machinery as an indispensable instrument for the implementation of constructive programs, and to broaden popular support for the Government.

In the economic field, much depends on the evolution of the military situation and the progress of pacification, as the production and circulation of goods depend on the extent of security throughout the national territory, and defense efforts influence heavily our national budget. We have managed to keep inflation and prices within reasonable bounds. But as our defense efforts increase, inflationary pressure on our economy also increases. American aid to the Republic of Vietnam, through the mechanisms of the Commodity Import Program, depends not only on the aid appropriated, but also on the absorption capacity of imported commodities into the Vietnamese Market. The volume of imported goods into Vietnam, in turn, is influenced by the general atmosphere of security in the country, because people naturally have a tendency to hoard their savings and reduce consumption during the period of enemy attacks against populated areas. Therefore, I hope that ways can be devised to generate sufficient counterpart funds which are more needed for the strengthening of defense, at a time when the absorption capacity of imported goods into Vietnam is liable to fluctuations or restrictions.

On the other hand, it is desirable that ways can also be found to channel an increasing part of aid to economic development, in proportion to the amount of consumers' goods imported through the aid mechanisms.

Since the Guam Conference in March 1967, long range economic planning has been under way so that, if war should continue, we can fight and build at the same time, and if peace could become a reality in the near future we would be able to devote our natural and human resources to peaceful pursuits with a minimum of necessary adjustments.

In this field, beyond the scope of South Vietnam, we look forward to an era of constructive regional development, so promising for Southeast Asia, which, in his speech at Johns Hopkins University three years ago, President Johnson in a great vision of statesmanship has shown to friends and foes alike as a bright alternative to the present war.

In our joint commitment to the search for a just and stable peace, I completely share the views which President Johnson expressed in his San Antonio speech and his historical speech of March 31st.

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After so many years of war, we are longing for peace, but we cannot accept from the Communists, according to the expressions of President Johnson, "a fake solution and call it peace", because such a solution would be only a time bomb for Southeast Asia and for the world.

Genuine peace can in no way be assured until it has become a reality. We realize that the road ahead is still long and arduous. The presence of American troops was instrumental in stemming the tide of Communist aggression in 1965. Today it is still instrumental in an effective joint system for the defense of Vietnam. But we realize that we, Vietnamese, are mostly affected by this war, which is waged on our soil, against our own freedom. Therefore, we feel that we are duty bound to shoulder each day an increasing share in this struggle. As you know, with the whole hearted approval of the National Assembly of the RVN, I have decreed general mobilization. Our Armed Forces will be over 800,000 men by the end of this year. The needed armaments, equipment, training, as well as the financial and economic aspects in these defense efforts, are the problems for which I hope the defense experts in our two governments would be able to find suitable solutions.

Our enemy has been seriously weakened by our vigorous responses. The Communist aggressors suffer a serious shortage in manpower both because of the repairs needed in the North on their various installations and ways of communications, and the very heavy casualties they have sustained since the beginning of this year, much heavier in comparison with past years. The enemy has had to change completely his classical strategy, which consists in concentrating on the subversion and harassing tactics in the countryside to surround the cities, and to launch offensives only when he is sure in advance of victory. Instead, the enemy has chosen, since the Vietnamese New Year, to launch attacks against the cities, in an adventurous manner which has caused a heavy toll in his ranks. Today, the Viet-Cong have to draft children to fill the gaps in their units, and their recruits are poorly trained and inadequately motivated. As a consequence, enemy morale has lowered, and this year for the first time enemy defectors have come to us in whole units, and there are individual defectors from the enemy up to the rank of regimental commanders. This is an encouraging development, however we expect further Communist major offensives this year because the Communists are anxious to obtain some gains through these offensives to exert political pressures while peace conversations are under way. But we are ready for this eventuality.

We do hope, of course, that a just and honorable peace can be obtained at the negotiating table. We would have however to make sure that such a peace could be durable. Past experiences have shown that peace cannot be secured simply through the pledges and signatures of the aggressors. It has to be accompanied by effective international guarantees, credible to friends and foes alike.

In concluding, I would like to express our deep gratitude for the generous help and valiant support of the United States in this crucial struggle.

I also greatly appreciate the thoughtful and close consultations which you have maintained with the Vietnamese Government in relation to the present exploratory talks in Paris. We are fighting for a just cause, and I am convinced that international public opinion will increasingly realize that, in this struggle for peace in freedom, we deserve the support and sympathy of free men everywhere.

Thank you very much.

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