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PRESS CONFERENCE HELD BY
PRESIDENT NGUYEN VAN THIEU, SEPTEMBER 19, 1969

Saigon, September 22--President Nguyen Van Thieu Friday evening dealt with national affairs at a meeting with the press within the 'People Want to Know' TV Program sponsored by Viet-Nam Press in cooperation with the National Television System.

Following is the full text of the interview:

Viet-Nam Press: Recently a U.S. committee by the name of 'National Committee For a Political Settlement in Viet-Nam' proposed a solution including six points one of which is called the 'Leopard Spots Ceasefire.' Is the 'Leopard Spots Ceasefire' or any other form of ceasefire realizable? If yes, under what conditions?

Pres. Thieu: First, I want to point out that this is merely a private committee, neither connected with the U.S. Government, nor the American Legislative Branches. Therefore, the first thing that I want to confirm is that the committee has no responsibility to canvas our Government and absolutely no influence in the solving of the Viet-Nam war. This is a private committee and, naturally, in a democratic regime, any committee which wants to find a solution has the right to sound out public opinion as well as to voice out their own impressions. But it is up to the Government and the people of Viet-Nam to decide. The relations between the RVN and the U.S. are the relations between two Governments and two peoples.

The second problem I want to point out is the six point solution. Besides such points as land reform, economy development, international control commission, which we have thought of long ago, there is the proposal for an immediate ceasefire which I find unrealistic. In my opinion, a ceasefire must lead to the end of the war. But to end the war we must have the guarantees for a genuine peace, we must set up measures to control this peace solution. First of all we must control the ceasefire, the regrouping and withdrawal of invading forces. Then, we can start to realize the ceasefire.

In my opinion, a ceasefire is the first step to end the war; however, we cannot let the Communists take advantage of a ceasefire to realize their scheme of 'fighting-and-talking' as they did formerly.

Tuen Tuyen Daily: Mr. President, the AFP in its Thursday news report dealt with measures of ceasefire in Viet-Nam on which you have recently expressed your opinions. Would you please tell us if there are any other anticipations such as drawing southward for a new parallel the present demarcation line or ~~conceding~~ any territorial areas along the border to the Communist side?

Pres. Thieu: First of all, I did not know for whose profit the AFP put forth such alternatives which are absolutely disadvantageous to the cause of the RVN. In other words, I want to say that such alternatives are entirely profitable to the Communists.

I must say that, the AFP has so far dispatched news reports absolutely disadvantageous to our self-defense struggle, and that none of such alternatives is acceptable.

I have said that we will concede not one village, not one area even those which are sterile land, unuseful forests or mountains. The suggestion that one or two inhabited parallels be handed over to the Communists is totally unthinkable.

The RVN Government stand is clearcut, one: South Vietnamese territory is integral and South Vietnamese sovereignty is an integral whole. We can accept only the solution as highlighted in our July 11th peace initiative which has been regarded as conciliatory alternative for the settlement of the war. We can not make any other concessions such as a coalition government or the abandonment of any piece of our territory to the Communists.

Tien Tuyen: Mr. President, would you please tell us what is the impact of the withdrawal of 35,000 U.S. troops to the Viet-Nam war and to the defense of Saigon?

Pres. Thieu: I reiterate that six or seven months ago we said that in 1969 the RVN Armed Forces would have to replace some 50,000 U.S. troops. By the end of this year some 60,000 U.S. troops will be withdrawn from Viet-Nam. The difference of 10,000 is in no way significant. What is important rests on the three criteria upon which the U.S. President and I had agreed: The progress of the Paris meetings, the decrease in aggressiveness and intensity on the Communist side and the development of the RVN Armed Forces combat efficiency.

The two recent withdrawals of U.S. troops are only the result of the third criterium. The withdrawal of 60,000 U.S. troops in 1969 should be regarded as a result of the RVNAF capacity in the safeguard of our general security and in the carrying out of the Pacification Program. For this reason, we agreed to such a figure. However, I would like to remind all of you and our compatriots that at Independence Palace during President Nixon's visit to Viet-Nam, the U.S. President and I agreed that starting next year such withdrawals of troops will be based on the first two criteria. I think that in 1970, withdrawals of U.S. troops will be decided by both governments, because that is what the U.S. Government promised us.

Tin Sang: Mr. President, to our knowledge, the other side will participate in the elections in the future. What is your opinion on this issue?

Pres. Thieu: I think that you are referring to the elections we point out in our July 11th peace initiative. Well, the elections we proposed had once worried legislators, people and political parties. They asked about when the elections would take place and what kind of elections we would hold? Up until now I have only presented a voting principle advocating equity which means that every participant in the elections has the right to control the elections.

Secondly, besides control, there is also the problem of supervision or of international control.

Thirdly, when speaking of elections in a democratic process, we refer to the elections of village councils, hamlet chiefs, provincial councils, Lower House representatives, senators and even the President of the nation, it is on this basis that we have thus far held the elections and we admit the participation of all others in the elections.

As for when such elections will be held we have mentioned it in the fourth item of our six-point peace plan. The program and purpose of the elections constitute what we are ready to discuss with the other side if they are ready to accept serious talks.

Such talks are in search of a solution to the war in the spirit of national reconciliation and people's unity. If a genuine peace can be restored after the talks, there will be other things to deal with than what is stipulated in the Constitution. For example, the election can take place either earlier or later than previously scheduled. Of course, when setting a solution to the war we must know what our objectives are. The objectives are democracy, a guaranteed peace, and equity in the elections.

According to our laws and Constitution, we will consider the proposals of the other side. I have made clear that I will not do anything which goes against the present Constitution. I will consult the National Assembly for decisions, and if necessary, the National Assembly will refer to a plebiscite.

Tin Sang: If we admit the presence of the other side in the political activities in South Viet-Nam, do you visualize the reactions of the Nationalists? And have you thought of measures to coordinate political activities in South Viet-Nam?

Pres. Thieu: I would like to make clear that if we accept a solution to settle the war and to restore peace in the country by allowing the other side to participate in the elections in the spirit of national reconciliation and people's unity, we do not accept in any way the existence of a Communist party in South Viet-Nam. I have previously explained that Article 4 of our Constitution cannot be changed.

The elections held on the 'one person, one vote' principle have no other purpose than to settle the war. Later on, political activities in South Viet-Nam must be carried out within the democratic framework, but this does not allow the Communist party to operate. As for the results of the elections and the activities of political parties after the elections, I think that although we do not allow the Communists to legally operate, we must remember that the Communists always try to operate illegally. I have said that the Communists are similar to microbes, which always exist and expand. Our nation is an organism, if the organism is weak, the microbes will expand themselves and ruin the organism. If our organism is strong, the microbes will be destroyed.

From now until the day peace is restored, the generations of our children our grand children, we must maintain that struggle, because the Communists will still exist. Therefore I have said many times that we should hold political activities within communities. Communities should unite strong groups and should be guided in political indoctrination among the Communists. We should gather our political communities into two or three strong parties to fight against the Communists, in the field of politics as well as during the elections.

Xay Dung: Mr. President, would you please make clear the cases of Mr. Huynh Van Trong, Assistant in charge of political affairs to the President and a number of persons detained in Communist cadre or a double agent and whether the Government had used Huynh Van Trong to contact the other side. Were Phan Nghi and Cao Tran under detention in the Vu Ngoc Nha Case?

Pres. Thieu: First of all, I would like to give a definite answer. Mr. Huynh Van Trong was among the assistants at the Presidential Palace, who was in charge of any problems with which we want to deal. When we used Mr. Huynh Van Trong as an assistant, we were interested in his capacities, his relationship with political organizations in the country. But the problem is, when a person turns out to be a high ranking official of a governmental agency, such as the Presidential Palace, or any Ministry, you can be sure that the Communists will try all means to contact him. Mr. Trong's case was a concrete example. The Communists want to get in touch with high ranking officials, to try to get highly valuable information on our strategy. We uncovered Mr. Trong's case in time. In reality, he is not a double agent, nor does he belong to any spy organizations, because when we uncovered this intelligence network, we found out that Mr. Huynh Van Trong was one of those contacted by the Communists. Mr. Trong himself said: "All information I got from the Presidential Palace was already announced by the President to the press and other people." Therefore, during the period when Mr. Trong worked with me, he could not exploit any important political or strategic data.

As for reporters Phan Nghi and Cao Tran, I must first recognize their qualifications. Mr. Phan Nghi was a very good reporter and was considered as among the anti-Communist ranks. But since the time he went to France, he has changed his tendencies. He was later caught in the above intelligence network. But he only operated in the field of the press.

Mr. Tran did not go to France, but he has had tie-ups with this Communist intelligence cell.

Mr. Phan Nghi himself confessed that since his return from France, his thoughts had changed a great deal and he had written press articles which tended to be favorable to the other side. His case is still being investigated, and such cases will be impartially tried, in accordance with the charges.

Xay Dung: Mr. President, this is our second question: Do you intend to set up an advisory council also called the National Political Council gathering prestigious political and religious elements? In that case, what will be the position of the council? Will it be a council reserved for the Presidential Palace or a new institution? Will the second case violate the Constitution.

Pres. Thieu: Personally, I do not intend to set up a national political council, and people who say that such a council will help the President or support certain peace formulation projects, are wrong. This is only the suggestion of certain persons and political organization. My conception is very clear: In this nation, besides the members of governmental agencies, there is a number of capable persons who have valuable ideas to contribute to the government. I want to gather all the ideas and suggestions of these persons, I intend to ask them to serve as advisors. As for the setting up of an advisory council, I will discuss it with them.

As far as I am concerned, I only want to invite such personalities to serve as individual advisors. But nothing prevents them from getting together and discussing

a problem. It is certain, however, that they will not get involved in the duties of the National Assembly or any other Constitutional agencies.

Tien Tuyen: Mr. President, may we ask you about a problem which affects the whole population. During the recent past because of the price spiralling, rumors run that the Vietnamese piaster will be devaluated. Would you tell us to what extend such rumors are right?

Pres. Thieu: Such rumors are entirely groundless.

Being a country which is at war, we have a lot of expenses. If we do not collect enough funds each year, the national budget will be off balance. If the national budget decreases, the pressure of inflation becomes more and more pressing and will certainly lead to the devaluation of the piaster. We want to prevent this problem in other words, we must prevent "illness," we are determined not to let it occur. To prevent "illness" this year, we should equalize the budget and the expenditures and revenues to avoid the inflation which could lead to the devaluation of the piaster.

For this reason, as the Prime Minister has told you, we have worked out measures to increase the income and decrease the expenditures. Such measures are designed to establish balance. Today I will not name these measures but I can show you some examples: the saving programme, the austerity programme, the increase of taxes levied on beneficiaries, the increase of production of our country, the problems we must discuss with the U.S. Government such as the improving standards of economic and financial aid.

If these measures are strictly carried out the devaluation of the piaster will not occur and I can be sure that we will certainly have a good economic prospect. For the next year these measures will help to lessen our expenditures for the defense missions and the pacification and reconstruction works and avoid the threat of a drop of the national budget.

Tien Tuyen: Mr. President, we have heard that after the Cabinet reshuffle, there will be a reorganization of the central administrative machinery. What is the policy of such a reorganization?

Pres. Thieu: We have many missions to carry out in the reorganization of the administration and other national structures. At present we are pushing forward the reorganization of the village and hamlet administrative systems. We will then gradually reorganize the provincial administration, central agencies and Ministries with a view to reduce expenses and increase effectiveness.

Naturally this could not be done in one year, at present, progress has been made in the hamlet and village administration.

With regards to the future, I can tell you about two reorganization projects. The first is the reorganization of the Presidency. We do that to reduce the budget. For example, I will abolish the office of the Secretary General. I have established a national planning Commissioner-General's office under the jurisdiction of the Presidency, the administrative innovation has greatly progressed, so, I am entrusting this to the Prime Minister's office to reduce the budget. Administrative Innovation Commissioner General's office and an administrative innovation council.

I am also abolishing the National Planning Commissioner General's office and the National Planning Council so that presently there is only a Presidential Assistant in charge of planning and development. He will use only the existing planning Directorate General and the National Institute of Statistics.

The second reform is the reorganization of the state-owned enterprises and joint enterprises. There are a great many of them and the government has invested hundreds of billions of piasters in them. But so far, their organization and functioning and the interests have not been controlled. I plan to put all of them under the direction of an administrative board and possibly the Prime Minister will be the Chairman of the Board.

A Minister of State would be entrusted with the supervision of activities of the Board, coordination of all these enterprises, thoroughly knowing their gains and losses, concentrating all their interests and controlling them closely to avoid abuses. Large interests of such enterprises will be used to compensate the national budget deficits and to establish new enterprises and agencies. I think this fact copes with my policy which the previous Cabinet was unable yet to implement. It is the policy of making workers and farmers property owners by setting government-owned and public-private joint enterprises in order to set up other enterprises. This will have great influence in the economic and financial fields.

Tin Sang: Mr. President, concerning the present war, we notice that we and our allies have some differences in the problem of ending the war. If, in the future, we must follow our objective which is to end the war as we want, do you think that someday we will have to fight alone for our national cause?

Pres. Thieu: We can say that at present every nation and everybody has allies. All nations in the world are related to others in the political or economic fields. The alliance among nations must exist and it requires the conciliation of interests and this conciliation must be equitable.

We should have allies as the North Vietnamese aggressors must have allies. If North Viet-Nam did not have the assistance of their allies, they would not have weapons and rice to carry out their aggression. We must have allies in the free world who secure us weapons and economic aid. The problem is that our allies and we have the same ideology and agree to the same course of action, but it is most important that we must maintain our national objectives.

I dare not predict the day when we can fight alone because in a few years we will be able to provide our nation with enough foodstuff but we are still not strong enough as far as weapons and ammunitions are concerned. We still need the assistance of our allies.

However, if our allies force us to surrender to the Communists or let our country fall into the hands of the Communists, we will break up with them; we will make all-out efforts to fight and will seek assistance from other allies.

Xay Dung: Mr. President, the rumor that you will suggest a new peace initiative has been denied by the Vice President and, then you recently asserted that you will make no more concessions to the Communists. But due to the stubbornness of the other side and the pacifists in the U.S.A., the pessimists wonder that, if the Communists accept to negotiate seriously with us, will you, Mr. President, take any other initiatives?

Pres. Thieu: First, we must say that such a rumor is very detrimental to the national construction. It affects the unity of nationalist elements in the common struggle and it may be helpful to the Communists. Besides it makes our allies doubtful of probable internal division on our part. Such rumors, in my opinion may be started by the Communist cadres.

So far, I have no other peace initiative on my mind. Vice President Ky said that the July 11th initiative aimed at suggesting a solution for the present war in a peaceful spirit. I insist that the Communists should agree to talk with us in accordance with the solution I suggested.

I have noticed that the Communists have no questions about my suggestions but they still do not want peace. Not only do I not have any new peace initiative, but I also foresee that the Paris meetings would not last much longer, not because we lack good will but because we cannot sit at the conference table for one or two years without saying anything.

I am not sending an ultimatum to the enemy nor do I lack good will, yet the Paris meeting would be dissolved if the Communists still do not show good will and understanding.

I repeat that I do not have any other peace initiative and that there is no internal nor external pressure, especially from the American Government as rumors claim. No pressure is forcing us to have new peace initiatives.

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Dr. M. T. Hazzard
Foreign Affs. Div., Leg. Ref. Serv.
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