

REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM



ON PEACE AND MANPOWER REQUIREMENTS

By

PRESIDENT NGUYEN VAN THIEU

April 10, 1968

*This is the text of an address
made by President Nguyen Van Thieu to the
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AN ADDRESS

by

PRESIDENT NGUYEN VAN THIEU

to

THE JOINT SESSION OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

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Mr. President of the Senate,

Mr. President of the House,

Distinguished Senators and Representatives,

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Ten days ago, on the inauguration of the first regular legislative session of 1968 and the first anniversary of the promulgation of the Constitution, I sent you a message in which I reviewed the situation of the nation following the Tet general offensive of the communists. During the past ten days, there has been a pause in the bombing of a major part of the territory of the north, and the North Vietnamese authorities have agreed to send representatives to explore the possibility of holding peace talks. These are viewed as important events in the situation.

Within my position and competence, I have constantly pursued the national policy of achieving peace in independence, democracy, and progress in reaching decisions on proper attitudes and actions. As for the legislature, the two houses have also adopted many appropriate and clear-sighted resolutions. This uniformity of will and views and the prompt and harmonious actions of the Legislative and the Executive in the face of the changing situation should be recorded as an achievement which we jointly have been able to make in the process of our present struggle and long-term national reconstruction.

I believe that our legislative and executive branches should maintain and reinforce this uniformity of will and views to further strengthen our position and our forces. At the same time, this will help accelerate the democracy-building efforts and further heighten the level of our development. This is my belief, and I hope that this is the principal view in today's meeting between the Legislative and the Executive.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am convinced all you in the two Houses as well as all our compatriots have given special attention to the recent developments in the situation. In addition to the news that the press and other information media have disseminated since the first of April, on behalf of the government I have also tried to present the situation in various ways so that all our compatriots can better understand it. On April second, I held a press conference to present my decisions and explain my position. On April fourth, the government issued a communique on the Republic of Vietnam's stand with regard to recent developments. Also on April fourth, I invited the two Presidents and the Foreign Relations Committee Chairmen of the two Houses to come to the Independence Palace so that I could explain the government's position. I will maintain these close contacts with the two Houses in dealing with the new developments, and I am ready to accept your close cooperation during the present difficult and decisive period.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today, first of all, I wish to explain to you and the entire population the position of the Republic of Vietnam Government. The Republic of Vietnam Government's position is clear to everybody. In the inauguration ceremony last October and in a message to the assembly on January 25, 1968, I stated that while we were devoting all our efforts and making all necessary sacrifices for the defense of freedom against communist aggression, we would not neglect any opportunity or initiative that can bring true and lasting peace to our country.

In this search for a true and lasting peace, there has been complete harmony of thought between us and the allied countries. Our common goal at present as well as in the past is *peace in freedom*. At the Manila Summit Conference in October 1966, the seven allied countries unanimously stated in a joint communique that they share the same will and determination to guarantee the freedom of South Vietnam. In their determination to seek peace and in their special concern for the future of the Asian and Pacific countries and to reach this goal, these countries will determinedly continue their military efforts regardless of the time needed through close exchanges of views until the aggression ends. In addition, the allied countries also stated in the communique that the search for peace must proceed until a just and appropriate solution is reached.

In line with this common policy, we have agreed to de-escalate the air raids against the North to show our good will for peace and hope that our antagonists will respond with equal good will in order to create favorable conditions for peace talks. The air raids continue in the area from the 20th parallel south to the demilitarized zone, where the enemy movement of troops and supplies is a serious and direct threat to the

allied positions. In deciding on a partial halt of the bombing against the North before the communists de-escalate their aggression, we have clearly taken a calculated risk in our search for peace.

The Government of Vietnam will be in close consultations with the Government of the United States and other Allied Governments regarding the contacts to be undertaken with the North Vietnamese authorities for the purpose of exploring the possibilities for eventual negotiations to end the war. Here I wish to state that the coming contacts will not have the character of a peace conference and does not have the character of a peace conference, but are only exploratory contacts to determine conditions which may lead to the holding of a peace conference in the future. And the governments of the allied countries have agreed to consult each other regularly on any important point or any decision during the coming contacts. This point was confirmed in the third section of the April fourth communique of our government and is consistent with the spirit of the Manila Summit Conference.

On January 15, 1968 the United States Government restated its pledge never to unilaterally take any action concerning negotiations without prior consultations with us. Last week, I convened in Saigon a meeting of the Ambassadors of the allied countries participating in the war to examine the general situation and take common actions. I feel that this formula is necessary and reasonable.

The United States President has invited me to visit the United States, and I am now considering this invitation. Although I have not yet decided on the timing of this state visit, I think that top-level meetings between the allied governments will be very useful in the forthcoming crucial period and that, more than ever, solidarity and understanding among the allied nations is necessary.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We all agree that the communists cannot gain a military victory because they cannot defeat the Vietnamese and allied forces. Therefore, they will concentrate all their efforts on gaining at the conference table what they cannot achieve on the battlefield.

The communists suffered severe losses during their Tet general offensive and the subsequent counterattacks by our forces and the allied forces throughout the country. It will be difficult for them to replace their losses, and this will certainly take time. In this abortive general offensive, the communists not only received severe blows from our forces and the allied forces but also encountered strong opposition from the Vietnamese people. They were victims of their own deceitful propaganda in believing that the people would rise up at the very outset to oppose our government and troops.

These severe setbacks certainly forced the Hanoi government to partially soften its previous absurd demand that the allied countries

unilaterally and unconditionally cease all bombing raids in the North and stop all other acts of war north of the 17th parallel before peace negotiations could be considered, as it has often stated. In its April third statement, the Hanoi authorities stated that their demands were not properly and completely met. However, they are willing to meet the United States to talk about the unconditional cessation of the bombing and other hostile acts against the North in order to open the way for peace talks.

The Hanoi authorities may resume the old communist trick of fighting while negotiating, which means they may continue to fight, on one hand, and, on the other, accept peace talks to obtain a suspension of activities on our part and to cover up their increased military preparations for future attacks. Later on, when they achieve their military buildup, they might launch another general offensive under the pretext that the preliminary talks failed to bring about the expected results. The communists will do their utmost to achieve some military success in order to have a strong military position at the conference table, in line with their well-known strategy of fighting along while negotiating. Therefore, we should heighten our vigilance and be prepared to cope with all new attacks by the communist aggressors.

In reaching a peace settlement, we must examine carefully the following important points:

First, although we have taken the first step in stopping the bombing over a large part of North Vietnam, it is obvious that any peaceful settlement of an armed conflict requires mutual steps toward de-escalation. We cannot accept and will never accept the unconditional cessation of the bombing as demanded by the North Vietnamese authorities in their April third statement. Whether or not North Vietnam deescalates the war will constitute the acid test of whether or not it genuinely wishes to enter into meaningful peace negotiations. In this situation, we must pay attention to the communist trick of false de-escalation. For instance, they might withdraw a number of troops from the Khe Sanh area, in order to use these troops more effectively in some other place in the first corps. Or, when they lack strength and are training more troops, or when they are constantly counterattacked by our troops and cannot initiate any operation, they may depict themselves as having good will and having deescalated the war. If the communists want to show good will in response to the curtailment of the bombing over a large part of the North, they should withdraw their troops from South Vietnam and reduce their aggressive and terroristic activities in South Vietnam.

Second, the bombing of the North is only a response to the aggression of the North against the Republic of Vietnam. We cannot allow Hanoi to differentiate between the military activities of the allies in the North and Hanoi's aggressive activities in the South, because their aggressive activities are the cause of the present war. Therefore, a cur-

tailment or cessation of the bombing of North Vietnam must go hand-in-hand with a curtailment and cessation of the aggressive activities of the communists in the Republic of Vietnam, including the infiltration of troops and weapons from the North and the armed attacks and sabotage activities organized and directed by the Hanoi authorities.

Third, peace talks must be prompt and productive. On this point, we entirely agree with President Johnson's San Antonio formula. We cannot let the communists take advantage of a curtailment in the bombing to strengthen their military bases and improve their supply system, and make preparations for further aggressive acts.

Fourth, if and when preliminary contacts lead to formal peace talks, the Republic of Vietnam should naturally play the principal role in the talks because the communist aggression has directly affected the Republic of Vietnam and the participation of the allied countries in this war was in response to our call. The communist tendentious propaganda has always drummed up the line that our allied friends have intervened in our internal affairs and have invaded our country. The Republic of Vietnam suffered communist aggression to a great extent for many years before we called for allied assistance to cope with the ever increasing aggressive pleasures of communist imperialism. Overlooking the fact that the Republic of Vietnam plays a principal role in the present war for self defense is tantamount to giving political advantage to the communists and jeopardizing the just cause, as I have often stated.

Fifth, we do not and will not accept the participation of the so-called South Vietnam National Liberation Front as a valid participant at any stage of the peace talks, even in the preliminary contacts. As is well known, this organization is just a facade and a tool of Hanoi. This fact has been clearly proven by the legal committee of the International Control Commission.

The perfidious communist scheme is to strive for international recognition of this organization at the conference table as an entity different from Hanoi. This is the enemy's first step toward a coalition government in South Vietnam in which the tool of Hanoi will play the role of a Trojan horse in order to seize the Republic of Vietnam through subversive political methods. For these reasons, we have affirmed that we will not approve a coalition government formula with the so-called National Liberation Front. Facts show that East European countries which adopted this coalition formula have suffered tragic results. We ourselves also had this experience in 1945 and 1946. The results of this formula would be the liquidation of nationalist elements and the complete seizure of the country through ruthless and cruel communist maneuvers. We should not forget that communism never accepts a coalition government as a permanent solution but only as a temporary tactic leading to the gradual liquidation of the nationalist elements.

Aware of this danger, the foreign ministers of the allied countries participating in the Seven-Nation Conference in Wellington to discuss

the Vietnam problem expounded the following views on this matter in the April first joint communique: "The Ministers agreed that the South Vietnamese people must be assured of the right to determine their own future through democratic and constitutional process without either external interference or terrorist pressure. The imposition of any form of government, including the spurious 'coalition' advocated by the communists and some others, would be incompatible with this principle and therefore completely unacceptable".

Indeed, if communist aggression is allowed to win through devious political means, the sacrifices of many of our compatriots and combatants as well as those of the allied countries will have become meaningless.

Moreover, for years our policy has consisted of stretching out our arms to welcome back the combatants on the other side who have put down their weapons and decided to join us, as law-abiding citizens, and cooperated with us in accordance with a democratic and constitutional formula in order to advance toward a respect for human dignity and toward achieving a lasting peace prosperity for the country. More than 78,000 combatants from the other side of the frontline have rallied to our cause and enjoyed our warm welcome. These people are contributing to our difficult task of rebuilding the nation. It is my earnest hope that through this vast program of National Reconciliation we may restore a just peace in our war-torn country, heal our wounds, rebuild our nation, and combine all our efforts and the national resources to build our country into a free, independent, and prosperous nation.

The path leading to peace will have a great many difficulties and obstacles as long as Hanoi sticks to its expansionist and aggressive designs. I do not feel too optimistic over our enemy's reply for they are extremely stubborn and cunning. I consider the North Vietnamese communists' answer a good and significant sign, but we should not be over-optimistic. On the contrary, we should be careful and cautious, for, as I have repeatedly stated, the communists always consider peace talks as part of their aggressive war designs. In war or in peace talks, we should always be vigilant, especially during peace talks. More than ever, we should be prepared and clear-sighted in dealing with all schemes of the enemy.

Thus, even when we are searching for peace, we should also more than ever increase our fighting capacity. We should do this so we may have sufficient strength to talk with the communists. Moreover, the communists will only accept peace when they see our real strength and realize that they will never be able to win the war even if they resort to all wicked and cruel schemes.

Our present build-up in all aspects will certainly be an important contribution to peace. At the same time, it will enable us to be prepared to cope with all other schemes of the enemy in the days ahead should the communists once again stubbornly destroy all hopes for peace.

To achieve our plan for increasing the fighting capacity of the nation, apart from the measures applied by the government within its authority and capacity, we deem it necessary to resort to a general mobilization of manpower and national resources in the days ahead to meet the requirements of the situation. I have decided to propose a general mobilization to the National Assembly. The draft law on general mobilization has been submitted to the Secretariat of the Lower House for debate and approval by the National Assembly. I respectfully ask the National Assembly to debate and approve this draft law with an enthusiastic spirit and in accordance with the emergency procedures. I expect that the two Houses will approve this draft law promptly and completely and provide a strong support for our efforts in the struggle as well as in the peace approach.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I have given you an account of the situation and requested the two Houses to pass the draft law on general mobilization which has been submitted to the Lower House and which can serve as a strong support for us in the war as well as in the peace talks. However, the mobilization problem presents another feature which cannot be realized through the enactment of any law: This is spiritual and political mobilization, which is an urgent problem and a national requirement. How to fulfill this requirement will depend greatly on the representatives in the two Houses who were directly elected by the people. The problem consists of finding a way to mobilize the people spiritually and politically. You are elected representatives of the people and therefore should be entrusted with this mission. I expect that spiritual and political mobilization will be achieved not only in this institution but also among all branches, all circles, all organizations, all associations, and all compatriots throughout the country. I appeal to all our people to stand up, unite, close ranks, and to strongly voice their desires for peace in independence, democracy, and progress. Our entire people are eager for peace, independence, democracy and progress. So, with all our strength, we should all contribute to the achievement of these noble objectives. With the solidarity and efforts of our 14 million compatriots, I firmly believe that we will score glorious successes, win over any enemy, overcome any obstacles, and achieve peace and prosperity.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In the message addressed to you on April first I pointed out that we are facing a situation full of challenges and opportunities. Today, I want to remind you of this. Certainly, you realize that in this situation, we will have to meet more challenges, but the opportunities will be greater and more brilliant. Everything depends on us alone. Whether we are able to overcome all difficulties and hardships and open up magnificent opportunities depends greatly upon the actions, the will, and the attitude of

the members of the two Houses in the days to come. The history of our race and the souls of our forefathers and fallen heroes will help us overcome today's challenges on our way toward a glorious and victorious tomorrow. I convey my thanks and salutations to you all.

EMBASSY OF VIETNAM
Washington, D.C.
1968