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EVENTS IN SAIGON STIR U.S. CONCERN

But McCloskey Says There
Is No Indication of Coup

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WASHINGTON, Aug. 24 —

The Nixon Administration was reported today to be apprehensive over political stability in South Vietnam in the wake of the events that have left President Nguyen Van Thieu as the only candidate in the presidential election October.

Reflecting this concern, the State Department's spokesman, Robert J. McCloskey, said that a coup d'etat in Saigon against President Thieu would be a "most unfortunate development." He said that the United States had no evidence that such a coup might be in preparation.

In San Clemente, Calif., the White House press secretary, Ronald L. Ziegler, said that "we are studying the implications of the situation" in Vietnam.

Other White House officials said the South Vietnamese political situation was "fluid to some extent" and that there had been a continuous exchange of telegrams on the subject in the last 24 hours between President Nixon and the American Ambassador in Saigon, Ellsworth Bunker.

State Department officials, speaking privately, sharply disagreed with the explanation made by the United States command in Saigon for the placing of American troops on alert. The United States command said the step had been taken because the Communists were planning to disrupt the election for the lower house on Sunday.

Vietcong Radio Quoted

But the State Department officials said that, on the contrary, there was strong evidence that the Vietcong's strategy was to encourage their votes for candidates sympathetic to the Communist cause and "peace." They produced texts of recent Vietcong radio appeals urging Vietnamese to "use our votes to serve our rights."

These officials expressed the belief that the alert had been ordered because of concern over possible anti-American demonstrations, and the general political instability in Saigon.

At the State Department news briefing, Mr. McCloskey took the unusual step of volunteering a comment on possibilities of a coup in Saigon even before reporters raised the subject.

"I sense in this room the speculation that coup efforts might be mounted," he said. "We have no evidence to that effect, although it is understandable speculation in this period because of the political dissatisfaction manifested over the past week."

Later, Mr. McCloskey said that no special significance should be attached to the phrasing he used.

Other State Department officials said the Administration was more concerned over the tensions that are expected to build up in Vietnam as a result of Mr. Thieu's uncontested candidacy than over a military coup.

They said such tensions may lead to a "decomposition" of political life in the country, rising authoritarian behavior by President Thieu and possibly violent responses by his opponents, leading to chaos.

"This would not only be dangerous to Vietnamese stability but immensely embarrassing to the United States," a State Department official commented.

American analysts said the Communist strategy, as the Vietnam war slows down, appeared aimed at securing key places in the Saigon political structure in preparation for a showdown with the Thieu forces and those of the United States.

Last week, for example, the Vietcong's clandestine radio, monitored here, urged the election of legislators who would favor income-tax reductions. American specialists said this was the first time the Vietcong had pressed for political action in Saigon "working through the system."

Urge Criticism of 'Lackeys'

The broadcast, which was made before Gen. Duong Van Minh and Vice President Nguyen LO Ky withdrew from the presidential race, said: "Let our compatriots unite in voicing their aspirations and demand" and in judging candidates for the lower house and the presidency. Let them demand that various organizations and associations hold timely discussions to classify and screen candidates and actively denounce the lackeys of the old regime as well as Thieu's sycophants, who are trying to win the elections by raud."

Mr. McCloskey, at his news conference, said the alert had been ordered, with the concurrence of Ambassador Bunker, because of indications that "dissident elements may engage in anti-American demonstrations or activities."

He said such dissidents were "not necessarily exclusively Communists," adding that that "political dissatisfaction was demonstrated during last week."

Other officials said there were signs that many Vietnamese resented that they felt was United States involvement in Saigon politics, expressed through Mr. Bunker's conferences with President Thieu and other figures.