

Saigon's Specter Of Coup

Hint by Ky— Then Denial

Examiner News Services

SAIGON — Vice President Nguyen Cao Ky's threat to "destroy" President Nguyen Van Thieu raised the specter of a coup d'etat in Saigon. Most observers, however, doubted that a coup is in the immediate offering.

Ky himself offered the most cogent reason:

"People who are planning coups don't talk about them."

Ky's press secretary also issued a denial of the statement originally attributed to "sources close to Vice President Ky."

Unopposed

The denial was not taken seriously by political observers.

Thieu is unopposed for reelection to a second four-year term as president Oct. 3. Ky and retired Gen. Duong Van Minh both withdrew from the presidential race, charging that Thieu had rigged it.

Ky actually made the remarks about threatening to destroy Thieu to 11 foreign newsmen at a reception at his home Friday night — under the conditions that they could not quote him directly and must attribute the information to "sources close to the vice president."

The denial was apparently issued to forestall Ky's arrest, something he conceded was a real possibility.

"But I will not stand still for Thieu to arrest me," he added.

Up to Generals

Thieu did not reply immediately to Ky, but said he would talk with newsmen this week.

Any real chance of a coup depends on Ky's ability to line up sufficient support among the the country's generals.

Ky is generally conceded to have the allegiance of the air force, which he used to command, and the Marine Corps.

Political observers said un-

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less Ky had the backing of South Vietnam's joint general staff and the corps commanders, the coup would be crushed immediately by the army.

Ky claimed that he had the support of 60 percent of the South Vietnamese army.

And he promised that the next month will be the "longest in South Vietnam's history." It was hard for him to believe, he said, that the election will take place.

"Thieu will step down once the pressure is on," Ky said. "Basically, he's a coward."

News of Ky's remarks was received with dismay at an American Embassy party attended by top U.S. and South Vietnamese officials.

"I was wondering what new disaster the day might bring," said one top U.S. official. "Now I know."

In Trouble

"I'm going home and think about this," an American general said. "I'm not sure who it is, but somebody is in trouble."

(In Washington, the State Department disclosed that a Ky aide, Dang Duc Khoi, delivered a message Friday to William H. Sullivan, deputy assistant secretary who handles Vietnam affairs.

(Neither the department spokesman nor Khoi would say what Ky's representative asked. Khoi said Ky "asked me to come and try to do all I can to discuss various ways and means for preventing a crisis from developing" in South Vietnamese politics.)

U.S. military sources disputed Ky's claim that he has 60 percent of the army behind him. Forty percent would be a more likely figure, they said.

In the event of a coup attempt, U.S. sources said, all the four South Vietnamese

corps commanders with the possible exception of one will remain loyal to Thieu.

But the generals, Ky said, aren't the army. Behind them, he said, "are old Turks, young Turks and mini-Turks" who will support him.

Ky conferred with at least two of the corps commanders in the past week.

He told newsmen Friday that all four corps commanders and the joint general staff support his plan for simultaneous resignations by the president and vice president with new elections to be organized by the president of the Senate.

Ky's Plan

Thieu, Ky said, is sitting on a powder keg of discontent "and I am looking for a fuse."

Comparing Thieu's situation to the overthrow of the Ngo Dinh Diem regime in 1963, Ky said that then there was only a "small powder keg," meaning the Buddhist protest movement.

Today, he said, the powder keg is much bigger because the protest against Thieu covers a much wider spectrum.

5 Minute Notice

"We Vietnamese people cannot accept a leader we despise," Ky said. "Thieu will not be the first dictator we have overthrown."

Ky said that nobody, not the United States and not Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker, could stop him from overthrowing Thieu. He promised, however, to give Bunker five minutes advance notice of his coup.



Mme. Nguyen Van Thieu, wife of the South Vietnamese president, shows a Saigon crowd the key to a newly opened hospital wing her husband

dedicated yesterday. The person applauding (center) is President Thieu. At left is his 10-year-old son Loc, home on vacation from a Swiss school.

—AP Photo