

Air Force to Keep Viet Combat Role

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SAIGON — (CDN) — The U.S. Air Force will continue to back up the South Vietnamese Army after American ground troops are gone.

Such sessions are usually held with top diplomatic and military officials or their key aides.

In fact, the Air Force is likely to be involved in the war here throughout most or all of 1972, highly informed sources revealed today.

Thieu's Requests

U.S. ground troops remaining in Vietnam will be considerably less than the 50,000 which South Vietnam President Nguyen Van Thieu has said he would like to see remain here.

"Air Vietnamization will be the last of the (military) Vietnamization programs to be completed," these sources said, "because of the complexities of training an air force."

An Air Force spokesman said aviation technology and language problems will probably account for the delay in pulling out the Air Force. Vietnamese pilots must be trained in English since it is the international aviation language.

All U.S. ground troops, however, will be out next year — probably before the November, 1972 presidential election, these sources said.

Another reason for the continued U.S. air presence are the B-52 bombers, which the United States has no plans to give to the Vietnamese.

Military Advisers

The United States will maintain a military force of between 20,000 and 30,000 men — but as advisers to the South Vietnamese Army and to meet congressional requirements on military personnel in countries receiving American military aid.

Raids by these planes have been vital, military men say.

Details on continued U.S. air support and final troop withdrawals are expected to be announced Nov. 15, when President Nixon makes a scheduled address to the nation.

This information was revealed in Saigon in a "background" session with reporters forbidden to reveal the official, nationality or agency giving the information.