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Renewed U.S. involvement

in Indochina feared

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WASHINGTON — America could find itself fighting again in Indochina — possibly against both Communists and the South Vietnamese — if President Ford sent U.S. troops to protect an evacuation from Saigon, U.S. officials said yesterday.

That appeared the chief concern among those raised by Ford's request to Congress for absolute power to use U.S. military forces in an evacuation, by his delay in ordering Americans out of Saigon and by his plan to evacuate Vietnamese as well as U.S. citizens.

Senate Democratic leader Mike Mansfield indicated the question of using U.S. military personnel in future Southeast Asian evacuations would be a major topic,

Vietnam.

Administration officials generally agree Ford has the power to order troops in to rescue the 5000 Americans left in South Vietnam. But there are serious questions whether he could also pull out 150,000 to 200,000 South Vietnamese as well.

The administration does not want to launch an early evacuation for fear it would cause a major collapse of morale in South Vietnam. Nor does it want to evacuate

Sen. Mansfield urges a speedy evacuation

when the Senate Foreign Relations Committee meets tomorrow.

Pentagon officials said a last-minute exodus of thousands from Saigon could go far less smoothly than the evacuation of Phnom Penh yesterday — carried out without prior Congressional approval — which removed 82 Americans, 159 Cambodians, and 35 citizens of other nations.

"The Phnom Penh evacuation was child's play com-

pared to what we could face in Saigon," a Defense official said.

Mansfield refused to rule out the possibility — suggested by other officials — that a last minute evacuation of Saigon might find U.S. troops fighting against panicked South Vietnamese soldiers, although he said that is by no means a certainty.

He said the success of the Phnom Penh evacuation made it easier to deal with

questions about whether Ford had the authority. Not a U.S. shot was fired.

Mansfield expressed concern, however, over the possibility of renewed military involvement, if the administration kept "dragging its feet" on removing Americans from Saigon. He urged a speedy evacuation.

Congress, Mansfield indicated, may be reluctant to grant Ford's request for authority to employ troops in an evacuation.

"I think the lesson of the Tonkin Gulf resolution will not be forgotten, but rather remembered, and I don't think Congress will ever be caught in that situation again," Mansfield said, recalling the congressional action a decade ago that allowed the U.S. buildup in

large numbers of South Vietnamese now, because many potential evacuees are crucial to any successful defense.

That means an evacuation is likely to be launched only under the most difficult circumstances — with the North Vietnamese advanc-

ing and the South in chaotic disarray.

In Phnom Penh, only 316 Marines were needed to secure a landing area for the evacuation helicopters. The evacuation took 2 hours and 25 minutes.

But an evacuation of the size envisioned in Saigon could involve sending in a huge Marine force to cordon off a large section of the city — or to secure a beachhead outside — and to impose order so long lines of refugees could be carried out to waiting ships over a period of days.

Not the least of the questions, some have said, is whether the American people would welcome a huge flood of new immigrants at a time of high unemployment in the United States.