

The Miscalculations in Saigon

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SAIGON, South Vietnam, Aug. 26—South Vietnam is now passing through one of its periodic political convulsions, one that is widely attributed to miscalculations by American officials as well as by President Nguyen Van Thieu.

The prospect appears to be that the crisis will get worse even if it will seem to get better. Underlying it is the

News Analysis bitter personal hatred between President Thieu and

Vice President Nguyen Cao Ky—both with friends in the military and each harboring an intense desire to see the other disappear from the political scene. Many here believe the feud will fester and erupt no matter what happens in the presidential elections still scheduled for Oct. 3.

American pressure still remains on President Thieu to accept some form of compromise to entice Mr. Ky into campaigning in the race, thus providing the appearance of a contested election. Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker has become an almost daily visitor at the Presidential Palace.

The talk today was that the President may propose the establishment of a type of watchdog committee, including Ky supporters, to oversee the honesty of the elections. Mr. Ky would hardly be expected to embrace such an offer.

Mr. Thieu's aides are saying that the elections will go on, noting that Mr. Ky's name will be on the ballots, although against his will.

Moves to Embarrass Thieu

By their withdrawal from the elections, Mr. Ky and the other possible challenger, Gen. Duong Van Minh, feel they have at least served to embarrass and weaken President Thieu. Diplomats agree.

The apparent result so far, these diplomats say, has been to increase the number of Mr. Thieu's enemies, strain his relations with the American Embassy and the Nixon Administration, enhance the chances of anti-Government demonstrations, divide the loyalties of the military, particularly younger officers, and provide the Communists with a propaganda

Moves by Thieu and U.S. Seem to Be Adding to Crisis

weapon to denounce the "Thieu dictatorship."

The events are also likely to increase resistance within the United States Congress to voting the billions that South Vietnam will need as the American troops withdraw.

Publicly, General Minh and Mr. Ky said they decided to pull out because President Thieu's aides were at work fixing the elections to insure his re-election. But there were other reasons, too.

When General Minh withdrew last Friday, Vice President Ky had been barred from running by the Supreme Court for having failed to meet the tough requirements of a Thieu-backed election law. The retired General wanted Mr. Ky in the race to draw votes from those who might otherwise vote for Mr. Thieu—hawkish Northern Catholics, military men and others.

Buddhist Support Sought

As a Buddhist and a peace candidate, the 55-year-old leader of the 1963 coup d'état against President Ngo Dinh Diem was counting on the anti-war An Quang Buddhist faction, other Buddhists and the war-weary to help him overcome Mr. Thieu's advantages as the incumbent. But when General Minh's aides turned up reports of rigging and Mr. Ky seemed out, many of the general's supporters told him to withdraw rather than see his image tarnished by defeat.

Whether the general would have quit had Mr. Ky not run into Thieu-built hurdles is an open question. But it seems clear that Mr. Ky would not

have been put back into the race last Saturday if the general had remained a candidate.

While Mr. Ky's name will appear on the ballot, General Minh's will not because the General's decision came before the legal deadline. Mr. Ky had no time to withdraw because the court rushed the "final posting" of candidates.

With the General out, it was now Mr. Ky's turn to try to embarrass his old enemy, the President. Because of his narrow base of support, he had a smaller chance of winning in a two-man contest than did General Minh and he apparently felt he could do more damage by quitting than by running.

Ky Hopes for Dissension

Now, the 40-year-old vice marshal obviously believes that civil disturbances by restless veterans and other disaffected people may help bring down Mr. Thieu.

Mr. Thieu is believed to have miscalculated in the currency crisis by apparently convincing himself that General Minh, who met the legal requirements for candidacy, would not drop out and that moves to destroy the political career of Mr. Ky would work. He was then reduced to trying to get Mr. Ky back into the race.

The United States policy here went wrong, in the view of many, because the Americans did not argue vigorously enough against the restrictive electoral law designed to limit the number of presidential contenders.

Many of the charges of rigging that the President's foes have made publicly are linked to the law that he pushed through the National Assembly.

"The warning signals were up a long time," said one diplomat. "If all the present American energy went into the election a few months ago it might have been a different story."