

Reverse Pressure in Saigon

Having refused to use the leverage of American aid to assure the South Vietnamese people a meaningful choice in their presidential election next Sunday, the United States is now employing that leverage bluntly to try to block the most likely alternate means for changing the leadership in Saigon. Administration officials have passed the word to South Vietnamese generals that any coup d'état against President Nguyen Van Thieu would lead to the ending of American support.

The plain effect is to commit the United States to maintain President Thieu in power in Saigon, regardless of the wishes of the South Vietnamese people. This flies in the face of President Nixon's repeated pledge to guarantee to the South Vietnamese the right of self-determination. It is also a hazardous gamble that could bring disaster for both Presidents.

The rising clamor against President Thieu has already extended to the normally subservient national Senate, which has called for postponement of the elections, and to important elements of the Catholic community, also customary backers of the Government. Unrest throughout the country is on the rise, and it is questionable that any amount of American intervention can stem this tide.

In underwriting the Thieu regime, President Nixon inescapably identifies the United States Government with Mr. Thieu's policies. These include the "four no's," constantly emphasized by the Saigon leader during his campaign—no coalition government, no neutralism, no Communist participation in politics, no loss of territory. In short, no peace.

Americans can find little hope in such policies of ever complicating themselves from the Vietnam tragedy. If the Administration refuses to withdraw United States support from the intransigent dictator in Saigon, then Congress must do so through speedy enactment of the withdrawal mandate which Senator Mansfield plans to reintroduce as an amendment to the military procurement bill this week.