

THIEU DUE TO ASK NIXON ASSURANCE

Off to U.S. Today, He Is Said
to Seek Survival Aid

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SAIGON, South Vietnam, March 30—President Nguyen Van Thieu is preparing to set out for the United States tomorrow, and officials at the presidential residence say that his principal purpose is to obtain directly from President Nixon the minimal assurances underwriting the survival of a non-Communist South Vietnam.

Specifically, Mr. Thieu wants two things, these officials believe. First is an American pledge to intervene with air power in case of a repetition of the full-scale North Vietnamese offensive of a year ago. The second is a United States guarantee of enough economic assistance to meet the costs of reconstruction and maintenance in this ravaged country.

[Meanwhile, the long-expected resignation of Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker was announced in Washington. President Nixon said that he had accepted it with

Continued on Page 3, Column 3

Continued From Page 1, Col. 1

“deepest personal regret” and that he would name a career diplomat, Graham A. Martin, to succeed the 78-year-old Ambassador to South Vietnam. Page 3.]

Opposition politicians here say there is another reason for Mr. Thieu's visit. This assertion is his desire for a public reaffirmation of American support not only for Saigon but for himself.

The view that such a personal goal is high among the objectives of Mr. Thieu's mission is held by a wide spectrum of politicians and Vietnamese political observers. Mr. Thieu's principal source of strength has always been American support, they reason, and a reaffirmation of that support after the withdrawal of American troops is a political essential.

Opposition politicians also interpret President Thieu's actions in recent days as manifestation of a conscious policy of refurbishing his public image to make it easier for Mr. Nixon to confer the sought-for support. There have been indications of an effort to present a Saigon administration intent on liberalizing its political practices and cleansing its hierarchy and bureaucracy of corruption.

In the course of this month Mr. Thieu has reinstated the practice of choosing village officials by elections, although none have yet been held.

Truong Dinh Dzu, whom Mr. Thieu defeated for the presidency in 1967 and jailed afterward, has been released.

Three political parties have been formed to replace the two dozen or so political groups that have had little influence on the stagnant political life of South Vietnam. Critics contend that the parties are made up either of Government jobholders who had no choice but to put their names on the lists or political elements that range from complete to luke-warm support of the President.

The opposition, such as it is, is avoiding the parties. This in-

cludes the “third force” represented by Gen. Duong Van Minh.

Some opposition members of the legislature who have budding political organizations speak of going underground as a result of the formation of only three legal parties.

Open Society Called Aim

The Government has also announced the dismissal of three province chiefs, implying malfeasance in office.

Officials at the presidential residence assert that Mr. Thieu intends to liberalize political life after years of wartime rigor, make administration more efficient and eradicate corruption. They say that an open society is the goal South Vietnam is striving toward, but concede that it will not soon attain what the West considers an open society.

The opposition believes the moves to be little more than tokens designed to attract American attention. It hopes that Mr. Nixon will insist on more genuine liberalization.

In an interview, General Minh, who despite reluctance to enter the political arena is regarded as the only viable opposition leader, declared that the lifting of restrictions on the opposition represented the essential for political victory over the National Liberation Front.

The opposition leader in the National Assembly, Tran Van Tuyen, said in an interview that the United States must insist that President Thieu implement Article 11 of the Paris truce agreement, which calls on both South Vietnamese governments to guarantee democratic freedoms in their zones. Noting American reluctance, after earlier acts of direct intervention in Vietnamese politics, to interfere again, he said:

“Above Thieu and nonintervention there is an ideal that we Vietnamese and you Americans are fighting for. You must intervene in the name of that ideal. You interfere by giving Mr. Thieu money, weapons and power.”

“What we ask Washington to do now is to give the South

Vietnamese people a chance to let a majority emerge.”

In the view of Mr. Tuyen, a former Deputy Premier, that majority is not represented either by Mr. Thieu or by the National Liberation Front.

Opposition politicians concede that despite their hopes, Mr. Thieu remains firmly in control of Saigon politics. His

hold over the army, administration and police has shown no sign of weakening since the cease-fire.

In view of the political apathy of the population at large and Mr. Thieu's control of the tools

of power, the opposition is under no illusion about its chances to influence Mr. Thieu's policies significantly.