

14 Oct. 1965

From news story on two books, "Kennedy" by Theodore C. Sorensen, and "The Lost Revolution", by Robert Shaplen. (Filed CIA.)

Controversy continues on the question of United States involvement in the South Vietnamese coup de'état of Nov. 1-2, 1963. Two books published this month give contradictory accounts of the information available to President Kennedy in the days before a military junta brought the nine-year rule of the Ngo family to its violent end.

The revolt resulted in the death of President Diem and of his powerful brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu. It also opened a critical new phase in the struggle to maintain non-Communist rule in South Vietnam. Yet the depth and nature of the United States role in the coup remain obscure.

Theodore C. Sorensen, special counsel to President Kennedy, argues that "neither the timing nor the scale" of the plot of the generals was known in Washington beforehand. His book, "Kennedy," was published Oct. 5 by Harper & Row.

A contrary view is presented in the book "The Lost Revolution," to be published Friday, also by Harper and Row. The author, Robert Shaplen, is a foreign correspondent who has reported frequently from Vietnam during the last 20 years. He is a member of the Executive Committee of the American Friends of Vietnam.

Mr. Shaplen writes of meetings between the generals involved in the plot and an unidentified "American representative." Presumably, though Mr. Shaplen does not specifically say so, the representative was an agent of the Central Intelligence Agency.

For at least a month before the coup, Mr. Shaplen wrote, this agent kept senior American officials in Saigon and Washington intimately informed of the plot's development.

Neither the Sorensen nor the Shaplen account suggests that the United States actively participated in carrying out the coup or in its planning. The issue is rather whether United States policymakers, including President Kennedy, knew enough about the plot in advance to encourage or block President's Diem's enemies.

Mr. Sorensen wrote of a message sent to Saigon from the President the last weekend in August two months before the coup, indicating that the United States would not obstruct any "spontaneous military revolt" against President Diem.

In the weeks that followed, Mr. Sorensen wrote, "Kennedy remained unwilling to promote or thwart any indigenous movements." He added:

"While all the reports of all the various plots and proposed coups had regularly reached American ears, neither the timing nor the scale of this one /of Nov. 1-2/ was known in the United States when it was launched, much less to Kennedy."

Drawing from both American and Vietnamese sources, Mr. Shaplen writes that reports of the plans were in fact relayed to Washington, and he says he can only assume that information of this sensitive nature would have been available to the President.