

A View From The Right

By C. WILLIAM GEORGE

A statement made by Sen. John Stennis (D-Miss.) recently set up a chain of verbal repercussions that stretched from Washington to Saigon. The good senator said that "if the South Vietnamese have an election that is substantially fair, and if they elect a government that says it no longer wants us there, then we wouldn't have a leg to stand on . . . and would have to retire." Of course, assum-

ing these if's, the senator is right. But what valid reasons exist for assuming them?

With the wartime, chaotic conditions existing in Vietnam at the present time, full, fair and free elections - the only kind of elections that could be considered valid - are about as possible as they are in Cook County, Illinois.

The tradition of full, fair and free elections does not exist in this wartorn nation and cannot be manufactured overnight. Only three general elections have taken place in Vietnam in the last decade, the last of which rsuld but fewer than 10 per cent of the qualified voters showed up. No less than 13 coups and attempted coups ocured in one 16-month span. What confidence can be placed in a "free election" held in such an atmosphere?

The hard truth is that we Americans have pledged "our lives, our fortunes and our sacred honor" to the defense of freedom in Southeast Asia. The United States could not honorably withdraw from Vietnam today any more than we could have honorably withdrawn from France in 1941.

America is not in Vietnam because we want to wage war, but because the communist cancer must be stopped someplace - Vietnam being a better palce for stopping it than Hawaii or California.

The national security of the United States cannot be risked through the institution of bogus elections in South Vietnam. Before free elections can be held, the Viet Cong must either be exterminated in South Vietnam or driven back into North Vietnam, and an atmosphere in which democracy can flourish must be established.