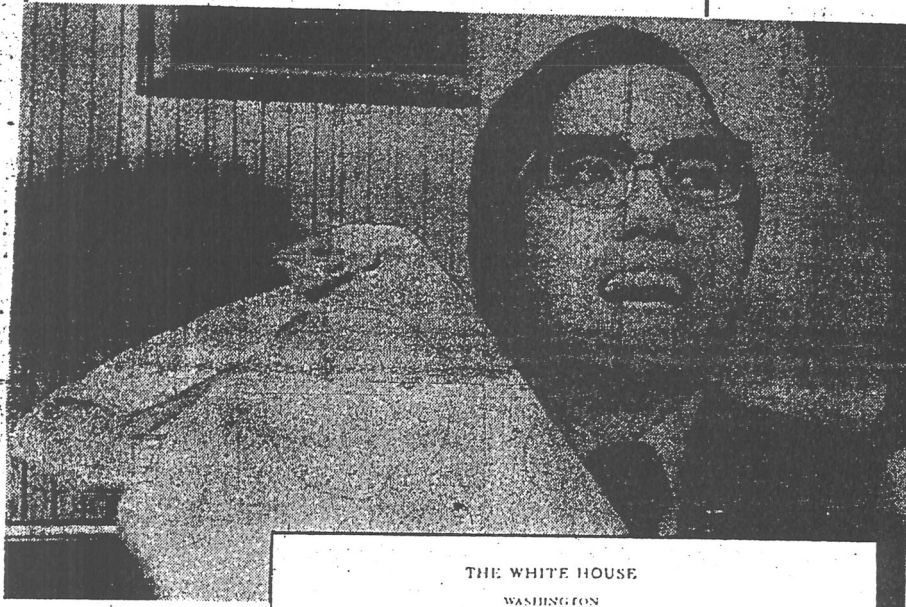


Nixon's Promises To Aid Saigon



Letters To Thieu Made Public

Washington

President Nixon promised "swift and severe retaliatory action" against any renewed Communist aggression in South Vietnam, according to two confidential Nixon letters made public yesterday by a former Saigon government official.

Nguyen Tien Hung, once executive assistant to former South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu, said Saigon took Mr. Nixon's word that U.S. military force would be used, if necessary, to enforce the Paris peace accords.

At the White House, Press Secretary Ron Nessen said the Nixon letters released by Hung "appear to be genuine" but add nothing to what is already publicly known about U.S. policy statements on Vietnam.

"The situation is that nothing was promised in these letters that was not promised publicly," Nessen said.

He said the letters disclose no conflict between what Washington said publicly on the issue of support for Saigon and what Mr. Nixon

promised Thieu privately.

He said the letters showed no secret agreements between Mr. Nixon and Thieu,

and reminded reporters of public statements made in early 1973 by a number of cabinet-rank officials in

which they stated — before Congress forbade it — that the United States might re-

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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

January 5, 1973

Dear Mr. President:

This will acknowledge your letter of December 20, 1972.

There is nothing substantial that I can add to my many previous assurances in my December 17 letter.

Congress and the people have been made out the many warnings we have made.

Should you decide, as I trust you will, to go with us, you have my assurance of continued assistance in the post-settlement period and that we will respond with full force should the settlement be violated by North Vietnam. So once more I conclude with an appeal to you to close ranks with us.

Sincerely,

His Excellency
Nguyen Van Thieu
President of the Republic of Vietnam
Saigon

AP Wirephoto
Ex-Thieu aide Nguyen Tien Hung with an envelope holding copies of secret assurances to South Vietnam and (below) one of the Nixon letters

NIXON LETTERS TO THIEU

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taliate militarily against renewed Communist aggression in Southeast Asia.

The White House, however, has so far refused to make public the confidential Nixon-Thieu aid correspondence.

One of the two letters, dated Nov. 14, 1972, attempts to persuade Thieu to approve terms of a draft peace agreement and says in part:

"But far more important than what we say in the agreement . . . is what we do in the event the enemy renews its aggression. You have my absolute assurance that if Hanoi fails to abide by the terms of this agreement it is my intention to take swift and severe retaliatory action."

In the same letter, Mr. Nixon reiterated the pledge, saying:

"I repeat my personal assurances to you that the United States will react very strongly and rapidly to any

violation of the agreement."

The second letter produced by Hung was dated Jan. 5, 1973, when Thieu was still resisting some provisions of the peace accords. It said in part:

"Should you decide, as I trust you will, to go with us, you have my assurance of continued assistance in the post-settlement period and that we will respond with full force should the settlement be violated by North Vietnam. So once more I conclude with an appeal to you to close ranks with us."

Hung, who said he was releasing the letters on his own responsibility as a private citizen, said that "over the past two decades, the United States by words and actions has encouraged the South Vietnamese people to take a stand against Communism."

He said Mr. Nixon's reference to possible retaliation against the North Vietnamese had to be taken against the background that, only

the month before, Air Force B-52s had carried out massive bombing of North Vietnam and that Haiphong harbor had been mined.

Thieu finally agreed to sign the Paris accords and has since condemned the United States for allegedly failing to carry out its support commitments to Saigon.

Hung said it was "unfair" for the United States to have made promises it did not keep. He noted that, after the Nixon-Thieu correspondence, Congress in mid-1973 forbade any president from using U.S. military force anywhere in Southeast Asia without explicit congressional permission.

"It can also be argued that in voting against military action in Indochina, the Congress was not aware of these (Nixon) assurances nor of their implication to the survival of South Vietnam," Hung said.

"If Congress had known, it would have had to consider the consequences of its ac-

tion in relation to the pledges to South Vietnam. There is only one U.S. president at a time, and foreign countries must deal with the president, no matter who he is."

Bitterly discussing the effects of the Paris peace accords, Hung said it gave Hanoi two years "of complete peace so that it could devote all its energy and resources to weaken South Vietnam and to prepare for the current all-out offensive."

"For all these gains to North Vietnam and to America, South Vietnam is now paying the price . . . none of America's major assurances were honored."

Hung, who arrived in Washington only two weeks ago in his former capacity as South Vietnam's minister of planning, said he was releasing the letters without Thieu's knowledge. He said there were four such letters from Mr. Nixon repeating pledges of American military action.

United Press