

Nixon Made Secret Pledge To Aid Siagon, Nessen Says

Private Letter to Thieu Promised U.S. Action If Hanoi Broke Cease-Fire

Washington

The White House acknowledged yesterday that President Nixon privately assured South Vietnam more than two years ago that the United States would react vigorously to a major Communist violation of the Vietnam cease-fire agreement.

In a statement issued in response to charges of "secret agreements" between Saigon and Washington leveled by Senator Henry M. Jackson, the Ford administration said the private assurances, which also included pledges on aid, did not differ in substance from what Mr. Nixon and others were saying publicly at the time.

It was, however, the first time the American public was told that as part of the effort to enlist South Vietnam's support for the cease-fire agreement being negotiated in 1972-73 by Henry A. Kissinger, Mr. Nixon privately assured Nguyen Van Thieu, that the United States would not passively watch another Hanoi-led offensive.

The private assurance as well as public warnings issued by Mr. Nixon to Hanoi in the winter and spring of 1973 are no longer valid, the White House said, because Congress has banned American combat activity in Indochina after Aug. 15, 1973.

White House press secretary, Ron Nessen, said there were letters between Mr. Nixon and Thieu as part of a wide-ranging exchange between the two countries surrounding the signing of the Vietnam cease-fire in Paris on Jan. 27, 1973.

A senior State Department official said that there was one letter in particular from Mr. Nixon to Thieu prior to the signing of the accord in which the American leader promised that this country would react to a massive Communist attack, similar to the 1972 spring offensive.

But the official said that Mr. Nixon was not more specific in his letter than he was in public about what might be done militarily by the United States.

The whole development seemed to have more political than diplomatic ramifications. The Ford administration seemed determined to demonstrate that Jackson's charges of "secret agreements," with the implication of deception on the White House's and Kissinger's part, were unfounded.

Mr. Ford, in fact, was re-

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ported to have told a group of congressmen that there are no secret agreements.

Representative John B. Anderson (Rep.-Ill.) told newsmen after meeting with Mr. Ford yesterday that "we were assured that there are no private, off-the-record assurances on the part of this government to the government of South Vietnam."

He said that Mr. Ford told the group there are "no hidden chapters yet to be revealed."

Tuesday, on the Senate floor, Jackson, a leading contender for the 1976 Democratic presidential nomination, said:

"I have been reliably informed that there exist between the governments of the United States and South Vietnam secret agreements which envision fateful American decisions, yet whose very existence has never been acknowledged."

Jackson said he did not actually know the details of the "agreements" but had been told by a highly reliable informant in recent days of their existence. He demanded that the White House make them public and that Kissinger, if necessary, be summoned under oath to testify. He repeated that demand yesterday.

After consultation with Kissinger, one of the few men in Washington who knew the background of the highly secret negotiations leading up to the cease-fire, Nessen issued the following statement:

"Assurances to the Republic of Vietnam as to both United States assistance and United States enforcement of the Paris agreement were stated clearly and publicly by President Nixon.

"The publicly stated policy and intention of the United States government to continue to provide adequate economic and military as-

taking office" by the National Security Council, also headed by Kissinger.

At a news conference yesterday, Jackson said the White House should make public the Nixon communications to Thieu.

He said that if they were just a reiteration of what Mr. Nixon had said publicly,

sistance and to react vigorously to major violations of the Paris agreement reflected confidential exchanges between the Nixon administration and President Thieu at the time.

"In substance, the private exchanges do not differ from what was stated publicly. The law of 1973, of course, ruled out the possibility of American military reaction to violations of the agreement."

In answer to questions, Nessen said he would not make the private assurances public since such documents are not usually released.

Jackson had said that Mr. Ford had only just learned of the "secret agreements" but Nessen said the assurances were made known to Mr. Ford "a day or so after

"I'm sure the White House wouldn't have waited until today to engage in what I call a confession."

He repeated his call for a thorough congressional investigation, alleging that the White House admission casts doubt on its entire Indochina policy.

Senate Democratic leader Mike Mansfield of Montana said that there should be an investigation by the Foreign Relations and Armed Services committees.

A reading of public statements by Mr. Nixon in 1973 generally supports the White House contention that the administration had made a

commitment to further aid to Saigon and had left open the possibility of military re-involvement. There was no record in Washington of any private assurances directly to Thieu.

In October 1972, Kissinger, then the White House national security affairs adviser, began intensive negotiations with Hanoi Politburo member Le Duc Tho in Paris. With an accord finally in sight, Kissinger flew to Saigon to persuade Thieu to accept the accord as it was being worked out.

From all accounts, Kissinger assured Thieu in private that the United States would keep a large air and naval force in the area that could be pressed into service in case of a new conflict, and that the administration would seek aid from congress.

Thieu, however, refused to go along with the accord and this delayed an agreement until January, 1973, after a major American bombing attack on Hanoi over the preceding Christmas period.

In that period, General Alexander M. Haig Jr., then Kissinger's deputy, went out to Saigon and carried further assurances. The Nixon letter was also delivered in that period.

The Paris accord barred all combat activity in South Vietnam and North Vietnam by the United States, but allowed military aid on a one-for-one basis to replace worn out and destroyed equipment. There was no ban on economic aid.

At his news conference

after the initialing of the accord in Paris, Kissinger on Jan. 24, 1973, said that the administration would seek aid for Saigon but refuses to answer a "hypothetical

question on what the United States would do in case of a new offensive.

He did say that there were "no secret understandings,"

but the question was about secret arrangements with Hanoi and not Saigon.

New York Times