

Haig in Saigon to See Thieu

Report of Key Hanoi Concession

Saigon

General Alexander M. Haig, President Nixon's special emissary, arrived in Saigon this morning, reportedly to present President Nguyen Van Thieu copies of a draft of a new Vietnam peace accord.

Haig will also go to Cambodia, Laos and Thailand for meetings with the heads of state of those Southeast Asian countries.

Haig arrived here amid intense speculation that an agreement to end the Vietnam war had been reached by the U.S. and North Vietnam and that Thieu would accept its terms more or less intact.

The speculation was heightened by a report in the semi-official newspaper Tin Song, which said that Haig had brought a completed draft of a peace settlement and that a cease-fire could come by the Vietnamese Lunar New Year, which falls on February 3 this year.

Tin Song, which often reflects the thinking of the Thieu government, quoted one source as having said that "the North Vietnamese had been moderate and flexible at the talks and had accepted the reality of two governments in Vietnam."

BREAKTHROUGH

Such a concession, if it was made by Hanoi, would constitute a major breakthrough in the peace negotiations. Hanoi has maintained for years that there is only one Vietnam, artificially divided.

The Saigon government has argued with equal firmness that there are two Vietnams — North and South — and that there can be no peace until Hanoi recognizes the existence and sovereignty of South Vietnam.

Tin Song quoted another

source as saying that the Thieu government was "neither optimistic nor pessimistic" about the prospects for a cease-fire.

According to this source, however, Haig brought with him on his trip to Saigon "a draft accord which has been amended by the recent secret talks" between Henry A. Kissinger, President Nixon's advisor on national security, and Le Duc Tho, North Vietnam's chief negotiator in the private peace talks in Paris.

DATE

"Based on the good progress that has been achieved," Tin Song quoted its sources as saying, "a cease-fire might be put into effect on the occasion of Tet this year."

The Tin Song article gave no indication that Thieu had made any concessions during the latest peace talks in Paris.

But a report circulated in Saigon yesterday that he had withdrawn his demand for written assurance that North Vietnamese troops would be withdrawn from South Vietnam after a cease-fire and had instead decided to settle for some form of tacit understanding on the question.

Sources independent of Tin Song said that if the newspaper's article accurately reflected the current situation, a cease-fire could indeed be close. According to these sources, if Haig has brought a draft peace agreement to Saigon, Thieu will have little choice but to accept it.

N.Y. Times Service

Reds Warn Report on Peace Not Accord to At Hand Yet Free POWs

Paris

Communist Vietnamese diplomats said yesterday the United States bombing halt over North Vietnam was an important development but that it did not mean peace was only hours away.

The Communists said more meetings between Henry Kissinger and Le Duc Tho of North Vietnam would be crucial.

The North Vietnamese said a report from Hanoi that peace might be declared imminently was "without any foundation."

Technical experts from the U.S. and North Vietnam met for 7½ hours yesterday and agreed to meet again today. The technical sessions are composed of language and legal experts working out the wording of a possible agreement as well as protocols to accompany the main settlement.

South Vietnamese spokesman Nguyen Trieu Dan also said, "Negotiations have reached a decisive point, but the less they are talked about, the better it will be. Let us wait for the development of the situation," Dan said.

The Viet Cong delegation demanded that President Nixon extend the bombing halt to South Vietnam as well.

United Press

London

North Vietnam and the United States have reached agreement on the release of all American prisoners of war within 60 days after a peace treaty is signed, according to a copyrighted story in today's editions of the Manchester Guardian.

The story cites North Vietnamese sources in Paris as saying Hanoi and Washington have agreed on a compromise solution to the prisoner question, in which Saigon would release all its military prisoners in exchange for POWs held by both North Vietnam and the Viet Cong.

The release of political prisoners held by the Thieu regime then would be negotiated with the National Liberation Front by Saigon.

The Guardian article said that the compromise secures the release of all American POWs but also "enables Thieu to delay the liberation of the prisoners, including the Communists and the neutralists, and thus prevent the emergence of a neutralist force which would probably side with the Front."

Washington Post Service