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Viet Peace Talks Moving Ahead?

WASHINGTON (AP) — The White House has left open the possibility of significant movement in the secret Vietnam negotiations over the next few weeks while labeling two current peace stories "totally speculative."

Presidential Press Secretary Ronald L. Ziegler applied the label Friday to published reports from Saigon and London, but did not issue a flat denial. Official policy is not to comment on the private talks between presidential adviser Henry A. Kissinger and Hanoi's Le Duc Tho.

Off the record, other administration sources used stronger language to discount the stories while acknowledging that elements mentioned in them may have been involved in the secret talks in Paris.

The Saigon account, a United Press International story attributed to "informed sources," said the allies will make a new peace offer before the Nov. 7 U.S. election. The new offer, according to the account, would call for South Vietnam's president, Nguyen Van Thieu, to resign and for North Vietnam to end its infiltration of the South.

The story sent the stock market shooting upwards during the day and led Democratic presidential nominee George McGovern to say he'd "gladly sacrifice this election if we can end this war one day earlier."

The London Times pictured a broad Washington-Hanoi agreement for a settlement to take place after the election.

Nixon, who has denied that the election will influence his Vietnam negotiating terms, met Friday with Kissinger and his deputy, Maj. Gen. Alexander Haig.

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der Haig.

Haig has just returned from conferring with Thieu and other South Vietnamese officials in Saigon. U.S. sources said Haig talked about the Paris negotiating session and, among other things, reassured Thieu that Nixon would not sacrifice the Thieu government for the sake of a quick pre-election deal with the enemy.

The quickening pace of diplomatic activity—including Kissinger's meeting with Tho on two days last week—has spurred a rash of speculative news reports.

U.S. officials agree this indicates "there is something going on"—even though they don't know or can't say just what.

The Saigon story said the allies would offer total U.S. withdrawal from South Vietnam, Thieu's resignation in favor of the speaker of South Vietnam's Senate and an end to the bombing and mining of North Vietnam in exchange for return of U.S. prisoners, a halt in infiltration and an agreement to negotiate seriously toward a cease-fire.

All of these elements, in some form, are in the Nixon peace proposals made public last January and May. However, U.S. officials noted, Nixon's offers have stipulated that there must be a cease-fire as part of a settlement.

The Vietnamese Communists have been demanding replacement of the Thieu government by a tripartite coalition. Washington and Saigon have opposed the enemy formula as a stacked deck which would pave the way for a Communist takeover of the South.