

Reports of Imminent Cease-Fire Persist But White House Is Maintaining Silence

By JOHN HERBERS

Special to The New York Times

KEY BISCAYNE, Fla., Jan. 16 — While reports persisted abroad that a cease-fire in Vietnam was imminent, the Nixon Administration refused today to shed any light on that possibility.

Ronald L. Ziegler, the White House press secretary, said he did not expect President Nixon to make any further public disclosures about the progress of cease-fire negotiations at least through Friday.

Mr. Ziegler also told reporters that Henry A. Kissinger, the President's chief negotiator, would remain in Washington for the rest of the week. But he said this did not alter his statement of yesterday that Mr. Kissinger would return to Paris "in the relatively near future" as negotiations continue.

In Saigon, The Associated Press quoted South Vietnamese sources as having said that a cease-fire would be declared by the United States and South Vietnam on the eve of President Nixon's inauguration Saturday to pave the way for the signing of a peace agreement.

This report came after Gen. Alexander M. Haig Jr., President Nixon's representative, met for two and a half hours with President Nguyen Van Thieu in Saigon on Developments in the Paris negotiations.

Nothing More for Now

Asked about the Saigon report, Mr. Ziegler replied:

"There are reports out of Saigon, there are reports out of many capitals in the world, speculating on the Vietnamese situation. I will only tell you what I said to you yesterday, that while the negotiations are in progress, we have a mutual agreement with the other side not to discuss the substance or the details of the negotiations.

He was then asked whether there would be any word to the country or to Congress from the President on Vietnam matters before the inaugurations."

"No," he replied. "You have had word from the President regarding the negotiations.

You have had word from the President on the decision that he made yesterday to suspend any further mining and shelling of North Vietnam based upon the progress that Dr. Kissinger and Le Duc Tho have made in the negotiations. I have nothing more to say."

Asked whether President Nixon would discuss Vietnam in his Saturday Inaugural Address, Mr. Ziegler said: "I would not inject myself into that."

He was pressed on what he meant about Mr. Kissinger's returning to Paris "in the relatively near future."

"I define 'relatively near future' to mean that when we are prepared to say something about Dr. Kissinger returning to Paris, we will let you know," Mr. Ziegler said.

Nixon Works on Speeches

The President has been at his waterfront home in Key Biscayne since Friday. Mr. Ziegler said Mr. Nixon worked today on his Inaugural Address and on his State of the Union message, which will be sent to Congress next week. He conferred Sunday and yesterday with Mr. Kissinger, who flew to Washington last night.

The Saigon report, quoting South Vietnamese sources, said President Nixon, through General Haig, had advised President Thieu that an international agreement had been reached to preclude further hostilities by North Vietnam, and to have told Mr. Thieu, "Trust in me."

According to these sources, a unilateral cease-fire would set the stage for an exchange of prisoners and for the signing by the Secretary of State of the United States and the Foreign Ministers of North Vietnam, South Vietnam and the Vietcong of the peace settlement reported to have been drafted in Paris.

The sources, reported by The Associated Press to have had access to the Thieu-Haig discussion, said that some "ambiguous points" of the peace agreement would remain to be settled after the cease-fire and but that it was hoped this could be done before the end of January.

The Associated Press quoted the sources as having said that although Saigon might have reservations about the settlement, President Thieu had no choice but to go along.

"Both sides are under pressure," one South Vietnamese official was reported to have said. "Hanoi is under pressure from the Soviet Union and Communist China. Everything must be understood in the context of an international arrangement in the light of the détente."

In Tokyo, Nihon Denpa, a pro-Communist Japanese news agency, said Hanoi sources expected that a cease-fire would be signed by the end of next week at the latest. The agency said that although details of the agreement had not been disclosed in Hanoi, available information indicated that there was little difference between the new draft and the one announced in October.

Paris Talks Continue

By FLORA LEWIS

Special to The New York Times

PARIS, Jan. 16 — Technical experts attached to the American and Vietnamese negotiating delegations met for six and a half hours today. They have been holding long sessions almost daily since the beginning of last week to work out details of application of a cease-fire and the wording of protocols to be attached to an agreement.

Neither the Americans nor the North Vietnamese would say anything about the meeting, nor about the substance of the draft agreement that Henry A. Kissinger took home with him.

There was a great deal of speculation, and some evidence that Saigon and perhaps both Washington and Hanoi were rather encouraging indicating that important concessions had been made by the other side.

Thieu Aides Visit

Tran Van Do, a special representative of President Thieu who recently arrived in Paris, said here today that "there are a lot of signs, but nobody knows yet."

Mr. Do, a former Foreign Minister, and Bui Diem, a former Ambassador to Washington, arrived in Paris from Washington Friday on an information-collecting mission. They are expected to return to Saigon at the end of this week.

They called on Foreign Minister Maurice Schumann this morning. It was learned that the Americans had not informed the French of the last week's negotiating developments. Paris was not pleased.

This afternoon, Mr. Schumann received Ambassador Vo Van Sung, head of North Vietnam's permanent delegation in Paris.

Mr. Sung repeated Hanoi's comment that the negotiations had made progress, but he added that whether they would be concluded with a cease-fire agreement or continuation of the war "depends on the U. S."

Report From Hanoi

Mr. Sung said he was calling on the French Foreign Minister in the course of normal contacts, and since it was his first visit this year he had delivered an account of 1972 events. He said that Hanoi had "surmounted all the difficulties caused by the blockade."

"The volume of products imported overland was greater than the volume imported by sea before the blockade," he said. "Industrial and agricultural production continued progressing."

As far as last week's negotiations are concerned, according to the best available information, progress is being made.

Last year, both Washington and Saigon were calling for a simultaneous cease-fire in Laos and Cambodia as well as in Vietnam. No discussion of that has been reported since negotiations resumed, and both sides in Cambodia have issued statements insisting that they would fight on to victory. The indication is that the simultaneous cease-fire demand has been dropped.

On the demilitarized zone, now being unofficially mentioned as a concession by Hanoi, best available word is that the agreement will contain the same language on the dividing line between North

Vietnam and South Vietnam as the language in the 1954 Geneva accord. That accord described it as a "provisional military demarcation line" but prohibited any military movement in or across the zone except by members of the International Control Commission set up to supervise the Indochina truce.

Tighter Language Sought

Saigon has sought tighter language sealing the zone to all traffic and describing it as a state frontier. No clear reference at all was made to the demilitarized zone in the October draft, but Hanoi repeatedly indicated that it would accept the language of the Geneva accord if the United States also made concessions.

Another reported Hanoi concession referred to the size of the control commission. Mr. Kissinger said that Hanoi wanted to limit it to 250 men while the United States wanted 5,000 men. Reports from Canada, which may be a participant, said "several thousand" were now proposed. However, Hanoi's spokesmen here have been saying since October that they do not consider the commission an important issue, and that they think agreement on its size and terms can easily be reached if the main political demands it seeks in a cease-fire are endorsed.

Those points are recognition of the unity of Vietnam and recognition of equal status for Saigon and the Vietcong in the South. All signs are that there has been no change on these issues, despite Saigon's attempt to wrest concessions on them through Mr. Kissinger by redefining the demilitarized zone, inserting a clause on South Vietnam's "sovereignty" or formally requiring withdrawal of North Vietnamese troops from the South.

Prisoners, on the other hand, constitute an issue on which Hanoi is understood to have moved. In what is considered an important concession, Hanoi agreed in October to release all

foreign military and civilian prisoners by the time the American withdrawal was complete 60 days after a cease-fire.

When the United States sought further political concessions in the November and

December negotiations, Hanoi withdrew this offer. Instead, it insisted that all South Vietnamese "political prisoners" be released in return for all American and other foreign prisoners. This is a point of special

importance to the Vietcong side, which counts a large number of its supporters in South Vietnamese jails and prison camps. However, Hanoi has hinted that an agreement on this issue can be achieved.