

9/13/72

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REACT--2

REUTERS STORY IN L.A. TIMES;

9/13/72

PEKING--SENIOR NORTH VIETNAMESE OFFICIALS HAVE HINTED THAT THE INDOCHINA WAR COULD POSSIBLY END BEFORE OR SHORTLY AFTER THE AMERICAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION IN NOVEMBER, TRAVELERS JUST BACK FROM HANOI SAID HERE SEPT. 5.

THE VISITORS, WHO HAD TALKS WITH OFFICIALS JUST BELOW THE LEVEL OF NORTH VIETNAM'S RULING TRIUMVIRATE, SAID WAS THE FIRST TIME THEY HAD HEARD EVEN A CAUTIOUS NOTE OF OPTIMISM FROM HANOI CHANNELS ABOUT THE POSSIBILITY OF A VIETNAM CEASE-FIRE IN A LIMITED TIME FRAME.

THE REPORTS CAME 24 HOURS AFTER THE EXILED CAMBODIAN HEAD OF STATE, PRINCE SIHANOUK, TOLD REPORTERS HERE THAT A FEW DAYS AGO PREMIER CHOU EN-LAI HAD SAID THERE WAS A POSSIBILITY OF PRESIDENT NIXON STOPPING THE WAR JUST BEFORE THE ELECTION OR WITHIN A MONTH OR TWO AFTERWARDS.

BOTH CHOU AND THE RETURNED VISITORS FROM HANOI INDICATED THAT NORTH VIETNAMESE OFFICIALS HAD ALSO SAID THERE WAS AN EQUAL POSSIBILITY THAT THE WAR COULD CONTINUE INDEFINITELY, HOWEVER.

IF NO AGREEMENT WAS REACHED BY NOVEMBER, THE NORTH VIETNAMESE REPORTEDLY AFFIRMED, THEY HAD "SURPRISES AHEAD" ON THE BATTLEFIELD. BUT THEY WERE SAID TO HAVE ADMITTED THAT THE U.S. HBOMBING AND HARBOR-MINING WAS HAVING AN EFFECT.