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NIGHT LD

WASHINGTON (UPI)--THE WHITE HOUSE AND THE STATE DEPARTMENT FIRMLY REFUSED SUNDAY TO COMMENT ON A REPORT THAT FRESH NEGOTIATIONS ARE UNDER WAY WITH VIET NAM COMMUNISTS FOR THE RELEASE OF A CAPTURED U.S. OFFICIAL, GUSTAV C

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HERTZ, AN ADMINISTRATOR OF THE AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT (AID), WAS ABDUCTED BY THE COMMUNISTS WHILE RIDING A BICYCLE OUTSIDE SAIGON 14 MONTHS AGO.

ACCORDING TO THE WASHINGTON POST, SECRET NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE VIET CONG HAVE BEGUN A NEW ROUND AND HAVE REACHED THE CRITICAL STAGE.

WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY BILL D. MOYERS DECLINED COMMENT ON THE REPORT.

A STATE DEPARTMENT SPOKESMAN SAID: "WE HAVE SAID MANY TIMES THAT THE U. S. GOVERNMENT IS DOING EVERYTHING IT CAN TO EFFECT THE RELEASE OF ALL AMERICANS HELD BY THE VIET CONG AND IN NORTH VIET NAM.

"FOR REASONS THAT SHOULD BE OBVIOUS, I AM NOT GOING TO DISCUSS ANY DETAILS OF THESE EFFORTS."

THE POST SAID THERE HAVE BEEN A NUMBER OF UNSUCCESSFUL EFFORTS TO OBTAIN HERTZ'S RELEASE DURING THE PAST YEAR. ONE INVOLVED THE INTERCESSION OF SEN. ROBERT F. KENNEDY, D-N.Y., AFTER HERTZ'S WIFE APPEALED TO HIM.

KENNEDY, THE STORY SAID, SOUGHT TO APPROACH THE VIET NAM COMMUNISTS THROUGH INTERMEDIARY EFFORTS BY THE AUSTRIAN GOVERNMENT.

A KEY TO THE NEGOTIATIONS WAS SAID TO BE A VIET CONG TERRORIST, NGUYEN VAN HAI, WHO WAS ARRESTED AND SENTENCED TO DEATH IN MARCH, 1965, AS A PARTICIPANT IN THE BOMBING OF THE U.S. EMBASSY IN SAIGON.

THE DEATH PENALTY WAS SUSPENDED BY THE SOUTH VIET NAM GOVERNMENT AND HAI WAS SENTENCED TO LIFE IMPRISONMENT. EFFORTS TO WIN FREEDOM FOR HERTZ HAVE CENTERED ON DEMANDS THAT HAI BE RELEASED.

THE POST SAID ONE STUMBLING BLOCK IS THAT BECAUSE HAI IS A PRISONER OF THE SOUTH VIET NAM GOVERNMENT, THE UNITED STATES IS IN NO POSITION TO ORDER HIS RELEASE IN EXCHANGE FOR HERTZ.

THE ACCOUNT SAID THAT ANOTHER EFFORT TO RANSOM HERTZ THROUGH PAYMENT OF \$20,000 BY THE CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY TO A GROUP OF INTERMEDIARIES IN VIET NAM FELL THROUGH.

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