

U.S. Cautiously Optimistic But Sends Further B-52's

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By TERENCE SMITH APR 12 1972

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WASHINGTON, April 11—The Nixon Administration provided a cautiously upbeat assessment of the fighting in Vietnam today, but Pentagon sources disclosed that two more squadrons of B-52 bombers had been given orders to leave for Indochina shortly.

The additional planes, some 30 in all, will increase the fleet of the giant jets in the combat zone to approximately 130, the largest ever assembled during the war.

At the same time, White House sources reported that Henry A. Kissinger, the President's adviser on national security, had decided to postpone his scheduled trip to Japan until early May, to keep a close watch on the situation in Vietnam.

Mr. Kissinger had been scheduled to leave this weekend for three days of talks with Japanese leaders. The sources said that he still planned to accompany President Nixon to Canada on Thursday for two days of conversations in Ottawa.

White House sources said that Mr. Kissinger believed

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that he should continue on the job in his capacity as chairman of the Washington Special Action Group, the Administration's high-level review panel, which has been monitoring the enemy offensive and recommending options to the President.

As a gesture of courtesy to the Japanese, who have been offended in the past by abrupt changes in plans and policy, the White House specifically decided that Tokyo should announce the postponement of the Kissinger visit.

Praise for South Vietnamese

With Mr. Kissinger at its head, the Washington Special Action Group met this morning for the sixth time to assess the battlefield situation and to map strategy.

Shortly afterward, the Administration's spokesmen at the State and Defense Departments offered their first tentative appraisals of the South Vietnamese performance. Stressing that Saigon still faces "several more weeks of major engagements" with the North Vietnamese, Jerry W. Friedheim, the Pentagon spokesman, said at a briefing that the South Vietnamese Army had performed "very well" in the latest fighting.

The State Department spokesman, Robert J. McCloskey, asserted today that the South Vietnamese had seized the initiative in the last 48 hours and that "the majority of the attacks" had been begun by Saigon's forces.

Both he and Mr. Friedheim were careful, however, to stress the tentative nature of their remarks and to emphasize that it was too early to reach any conclusion about the outcome of the offensive.

A less guarded — and more optimistic — appraisal of the situation was reportedly offered on Capitol Hill by Adm. Thomas H. Moorer, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, in testimony before a closed session of the House Armed Services Committee.

A participant in the session said that Admiral Moorer had told the committee that the South Vietnamese were holding on in all three major fronts in the fighting. The Admiral reportedly said that the situation would improve further when clear weather permitted

the full use of the augmented force of American aircraft and warships.

Representative Samuel S. Stratton, Democrat of New York, who attended the briefing, said he came away with the impression that "the attack has been contained and that the South Vietnamese have handled themselves well."

Admiral Moorer reportedly stressed the effectiveness of the strengthened American air power in turning back the North Vietnamese attacks.

A few hours after his remarks, Pentagon sources said that the latest deployment of B-52's would increase the strategic bombing force in Indochina nearly 30 per cent, to a total of about 130 planes. The highest previous reported total of B-52's deployed in the combat zone was 103, in July, 1969.

The sources said this was the major deployment of the giant third, and probably the last, bombers to be ordered to counter the enemy offensive. Thirty of the planes were dispatched late in February in anticipation of the fighting and 20 were ordered to air bases in Guam and Thailand last week.

While Administration officials have clearly been reassured by the South Vietnamese military performance in the last few days, they are still apprehensive about the fighting that lies ahead.

Heavy enemy attacks are still expected, for example, in the Central Highlands around the cities of Kontum and Pleiku and in the area of the Dakto airfield. About 30,000 North

Vietnamese troops are thought to have infiltrated into the vicinity from base camps in Laos and Cambodia.

"The South Vietnamese look as though they are in control of the situation at the moment," one State Department official observed today, "But no one is making any predictions. We are still waiting for the other shoe to drop."

Carrier Leaves Florida

WASHINGTON, April 11 (AP)—The aircraft carrier Saratoga and two squadrons of Navy attack jets left Jacksonville, Fla. today, apparently to join the United States air and sea build-up in Indochina.

In Jacksonville, ships and aircraft were under a blanket of official secrecy. But sources indicated that the Saratoga, which is normally assigned to six-month tours of the Mediterranean, was heading for her first combat engagement since her commissioning in 1956.

After the Saratoga headed out into the Atlantic, Naval Air Station. They presumably landed on the carrier at sea.

The Saratoga was expected to pick up other fighter squadrons on the way to make a full battle complement of 70 aircraft. Sources said that the destroyer Sarsfield was to leave Jacksonville tomorrow to join the Saratoga and that another destroyer might follow. The carrier Midway, six destroyers and a guided-missile cruiser left Pacific ports today for reported assignments with the Seventh Fleet off Vietnam.