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Conflicts Over Viet Cutbacks

WASHINGTON—(AP)—There were conflicting reports today from Saigon and the Pentagon on whether troop withdrawals from South Vietnam would continue.

The U.S. Command in Saigon said it had received no orders from Washington for further troop cuts after reaching a Dec. 1 ceiling of 27,000 ordered by President Nixon in August.

The command declined further comment, but other sources in Saigon said Washington had ordered a freeze in troop cuts.

The Pentagon, however, said that limited withdrawals will continue but will not be announced in advance.

White House press secretary Ronald Ziegler said the authorized ceiling would remain at 27,000 but would not say whether further cuts would be forthcoming.

Avoids Word

Asked about the report from Saigon, Ziegler said:

"I don't want to use that word freeze. We said we would reach a certain level by Dec. 1 and we have done it."

Noting that when President Nixon fixed the 27,000

level in August he said there would be another statement on withdrawals by Dec. 1, Ziegler said:

"I have just made it. We are not going to have any comment on troop levels."

Ziegler would not confirm the Pentagon statement that limited troop withdrawals would continue.

He was asked repeatedly whether further U.S. troop withdrawals from Vietnam might be made without any public announcement. He gave an inconclusive reply, saying only that the White House would not make any

—Turn to Page 8, Col. 1

—From Page 1

comment on troop levels pending the outcome of negotiations with the North Vietnamese in Paris.

"That's where the matter is at this time," he said.

Defense Department officials said the course of action they outlined would provide added flexibility to the U.S. position in the negotiations.

The officials denied that troop levels have been frozen, as reported in Saigon, and said that further reductions, although small, would show up in the weekly announcements of U.S. troop strength from the U.S. command in Saigon.

Freeze Ordered

In Saigon, however, the U.S. command said it had received no orders from Washington for further troop cuts after reaching a Dec. 1 ceiling of 27,000 ordered by President Nixon last August.

The command declined comment beyond that, but other sources there said Washington had ordered a freeze.

Laird, in a television interview, said the withdrawal program will continue, but added:

"I will certainly recommend to the President that because of the sensitivity and the seriousness of the negotiation track at this time that no announcement be made at this time as to the future troop level.

Beat Timetable

"I think that that would be a mistake, and might interfere with the negotiating track and so I will recommend that no announcement be made for several weeks," Laird said.

Laird confirmed that troop strength in the war zone had

fallen slightly under 27,000, thus beating President Nixon's timetable.

However, he said official figures won't be available until next Monday.