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Raids on North
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U.S. Cuts Back On Bombings

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SAIGON — The United States has sharply curtailed bombing attacks on North Vietnam in the last 48 hours, but it was not clear whether the action was connected with current peace negotiations.

The move was unannounced and the U.S. Command withheld comment on the reduction in air raids.

Since Sunday, U.S. planes have made only a handful of air attacks in the northern portion of North Vietnam, including the region around Hanoi and Haiphong, the country's two largest cities.

Sources other than the U.S. Command who frequently provide air raid information to correspondents also refused to discuss the curtailment of the bombing campaign.

"There are international negotiations going on and I can't even talk off the record," one source said.

Bad Weather

Another source said the Hanoi-Haiphong region was currently being affected by the northeast monsoon. "There is bad weather up there, but we certainly are not saying weather is the

only reason air strikes were reduced."

The navy has moved three of the four aircraft carriers that normally operate in the Gulf of Tonkin east of North Vietnam to the South China Sea base in South Vietnam.

Navy spokesmen refused to discuss the ship movement.

On Sunday, U.S. planes attacked North Vietnam 140 times, while yesterday 120 air attacks were reported.

Seen as Warning

Since the United States resumed bombing of North Vietnam on a sustained basis last April 6, the number of daily raids had been averaging 250 to 300.

During President John

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son's 1965-68 bombing campaign, air raids were occasionally suspended in an effort to influence North Vietnamese peace negotiators.

The current curtailment could be a warning to South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu, who reportedly has rejected at least part of a U.S. peace initiative.

Thieu has been telling close associates that one thing he fears most in the current negotiations would be a unilateral U.S. bombing halt.

There was little action on the fighting front.

Highway 13 was closed 21 miles north of Saigon, and South Vietnamese forces backed by bombers were trying to drive North Vietnamese troops from three hamlets in the area.

Military sources reported that Viet Cong guerrillas and political groups are stockpiling flags and loudspeakers for a major propaganda effort in the event of a cease-fire.

A document captured Oct. 9 in Binh Dinh Province ordered Viet Cong cadres to "prepare for a critical period of transition and make your presence highly visible." It was signed by the Viet Cong province chief.

Flag Squads

The document ordered the Communist forces to form special propaganda teams of three to five persons in each hamlet to raise Viet Cong flags, paint them on walls and houses and obliterate South Vietnamese flags with whitewash.

Each Viet Cong soldier must carry 20 flags with him, the document ordered, while political cadres must provide 100 flags per hamlet and 1000 per village.

Refugees from enemy areas in Quang Ngai Province reported that Viet Cong and North Vietnamese troops are forcing civilians to sew flags and donate red, blue and yellow paper for the manufacture of VC pennants.