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U.S. Urges
Caution on
Peace Talk

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The White House yesterday cautioned against "excessive speculation" about the status of the Vietnam peace talks after a spate of reports that an early cease-fire was in the offing.

Presidential Press Secretary Ronald L. Ziegler's remarks, coupled with a denial from Pentagon sources of a report that three aircraft carriers off the North Vietnamese coast had been ordered to move south, had the effect of cooling the air of expectancy surrounding the intensified negotiations.

Ziegler saw reporters after an hour-long meeting between President Nixon, Secretary of State William P. Rogers and presidential adviser Henry A. Kissinger, who returned late Monday from five days of meetings with South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu.

The press secretary repeated what had been said by the U.S. Embassy in Saigon, that there had been "some progress" in the talks, but he left the clear implication that there was still a way to go before there would be any resolution of the conflict, military or political.

If there were any remaining doubts about this, Thieu's speech in Saigon hours after Kissinger's departure, showed that South Vietnam continues to take a tough line. Thieu repeated that there could be a cease-fire, but only if North Vietnamese Communist troops went home, "not just . . . to Laos and Cambodia from which they can renew their attacks against the South." He also declared "a three-segment formula to be absurd and baseless and a disguised coalition government."

Thieu's speech was read by government analysts as more than a mere statement of position. They considered it a combined bid for domestic support and a means of forestalling U.S. pressure. By rejecting a whole gamut of compromises he appeared to be trying to make it harder for

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Kissinger to ask him to accept them later. If it does nothing else the speech tends to delay any immediate resolution of the problem.

At the same time Thieu appeared to making a bid for further compromises by Hanoi. In the same way North Vietnamese Premier Pham Van Dong, in his interview with Newsweek's correspondent Arnaud de Borchgrave, was seen as attempting to put pressure on Thieu and on the United States. By declaring readiness for a cease-fire and a return of prisoners of war the North Vietnamese sought to demonstrate that Thieu is the obstacle to the settlement.

The impasse between the two sides puts the next move up to Mr. Nixon. Ziegler said yesterday that the President has no plans at this time to make a speech on Vietnam. He said that Kissinger might see the press but ruled out any meeting today.

Presumably, if there is still hope for moving the talks forward Kissinger would meet again with North Vietnamese officials in Paris, where he has been holding secret talks. But there are no signs so far that Hanoi's chief negotiator, Le Duc Tho, is on his way back.

The indications have been that Kissinger reached some kind of tentative agreements with Tho that he proceeded to present to Thieu during his talks in Saigon. Thieu's rejection of a "three-segment formula" and of a cease-fire without full North Vietnamese withdrawal, probably amount to a description of the kinds of things discussed. Diplomats abroad who have closely followed South Vietnam's negotiating tactics suggest that Thieu is trying to pin down precisely the kind of powers a transitional government would

have, a process which could be strung out for some time.

On the military side, by demanding full North Vietnamese withdrawal, Thieu points up one of the Communists' main fears, U.S. specialists said. The Communists, these sources say, have long made clear their great concern about the future of their cadres in the South once their military forces leave.

These sources say the Communists thus insist on protection against what they call the "apparatus of oppression" represented by the Thieu government and a coalition that would guarantee them a fair chance in a future election.

Despite Hanoi's concerns, Pentagon analysts say a standstill cease-fire would help the North Vietnamese and hurt the South Vietnamese forces. A standstill cease-fire, however, would leave all forces in place, which appears to be precisely why Thieu is rejecting it and demanding instead that all North Vietnamese forces leave the South.

A dropoff in the number of bombing raids over the Hanoi-Haiphong area since Sunday raised speculation that Mr. Nixon was easing pressures on the North as part of a diplomatic move. Ziegler referred all questions on the matter to the Pentagon, where some officials said the weather could also explain the change in bombing patterns.

Daniel Z. Henkin, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs, refused comment, saying "we don't discuss operational matters," when asked about bombing cutbacks. Other defense sources, however, said that storm squalls within the last two days had forced the cancellation of some bombing strikes against the North from Navy carriers off Vietnam.

The same sources said the four Navy carriers were still together off North Vietnam as of yesterday, with no sudden movement south. The four carriers are the America, Kitty Hawk, Midway and Oriskany. The Oriskany's planes usually fly against targets in South Vietnam while the other three concentrate on North Vietnam.

An Associated Press report out of Saigon yesterday said three of the carriers had steamed south from their positions off North Vietnam.

The raids against North Vietnam by land bombers has dropped within the last several days, with no B-52s at all flown in the 24-hour period ending at noon yesterday, Saigon time.

Figures released by the U.S. command in Saigon show that the last time no B-52 raids were flown against the North was on Oct. 6. But the bulk of B-52 strikes has been against targets in South Vietnam for some time as the giant bombers try to break up enemy troop concentrations and destroy storage centers.

On Tuesday, for example, 27 B-52 missions—usually three planes but sometimes one—were flown against the South and eight against the North. This has been the typical ratio.

Despite the caution being shown at the White House over the state of the negotiations, Republican politicians tended toward optimism about an early settlement.

In Oregon and Washington where he was campaigning for Mr. Nixon, California Gov. Ronald Reagan said he was told in a recent briefing of a possibility of a Vietnam truce in mid-October if the polls convince the North Vietnamese that the President would be re-elected.

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