

Saigon Paper Suggests U.S. To Halt Raids

From News Dispatches

THE South Vietnamese newspaper closest to President Thieu yesterday suggested the United States would soon halt the bombing north of the 20th parallel to get the Paris peace talks back on the tracks.

The Saigon daily Tin Song, which is often used to promote Thieu's interpretations, said Thieu met yesterday with the two highest U.S. officials in Saigon—Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker and Gen. Frederick C. Weyand, the U.S. military commander—after the Communists had indicated they would resume the secret talks if the bombing were cut back.

Tin Song said the meeting was held "amid rumors that the United States will stop bombing areas above the 20th parallel in the next few days in order to resume the talks in Paris" with Henry A. Kissinger, the chief U.S. negotiator.

The Columbia Broadcasting System also reported from Saigon that "the United States plans to suspend the bombing above the 20th parallel in the very near future, possibly tomorrow."

"It is believed," the CBS report continued, "that this is in response to indications from Hanoi that they (the North Vietnamese) are willing to resume the secret Le Duc Tho-Kissinger negotiations in Paris."

In Washington, Nixon administration sources discounted the report but declined to rule in or rule out an early halt in the intensive bombing of North Vietnam.

North Vietnam already has announced plans for a one-day cease-fire over New Year's Day, to parallel the brief Christmas cease-fire. Presi-

dent Nixon halted the American bombing during the Christmas cease-fire and he may issue a similar order over the New Year holiday.

There is speculation Mr. Nixon might extend a New Year cease-fire into a more durable bombing halt. U.S. officials say this depends on whether the President concludes that he has adequate indications from North Vietnam that the prospects have improved for a settlement that will fit U.S. terms. As of yesterday, administration sources said, this assurance was still lacking.

The Nixon administration has refused to say publicly exactly what it is seeking from Hanoi.

The United States initiated the suspension of the Kissinger-Tho talks on Dec. 13, on the ground that North Vietnam was back-tracking on the original agreement. North Vietnam made the identical cross-claim against the United States.

Meanwhile, the highest Vietcong official now in Paris charged that Kissinger had tried after the U.S. elections to downgrade the role of the National Council of Reconciliation and Concord, which was to be comprised equally of neutralist, Vietcong and Saigon representatives.

"Now the United States is trying to deny that there are neutral, third force elements between us and Saigon. We firmly reject any move to downgrade the council," Dinh Ba Thi said in an interview.

Thi said the Vietcong would neither accept Thieu nor recognize Saigon as the sole authority throughout South Vietnam. "Thieu must go," he said, echoing the policy that was standard until the serious talks began in October.