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# Order by Pentagon Bars Comment on Peace Talks

By ERIC PACE

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WASHINGTON, Jan. 9—The Pentagon has forbidden all Department of Defense employees, civilian and military, to comment on the resumption of the Vietnam peace negotiations.

The order was contained in a directive sent to military commands around the world on Dec. 30, the day the White House announced that President Nixon had ordered a halt in the bombing of North Vietnam above the 20th Parallel and that private peace talks with North Vietnam would resume in Paris Jan. 8.

It was made public in response to an inquiry by newsmen after it had been criticized by Aryeh Meier, executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union. He said the organization had become aware of the directive on receiving complaints about it from Defense Department personnel.

### All Comment Barred

As released by the Pentagon, the message said:

"To all major commands and unified commands:

"The White House has this morning made an announcement of international consequences concerning the resumption of peace negotiations and a suspension of some military activities in Southeast Asia.

"There must be absolutely no, repeat no, comment of any sort whatsoever from any D.O.D. personnel, civilian and military, of whatever rank.

### Letter Acknowledged

"There is to be no comment, no speculation, no elaboration and no discussion on the subjects involved in the White

House announced. Should any queries be received by anyone, they must be turned away without comment and called promptly to the attention of ASD:PA [the office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs].

"Signed: Jerry W. Friedheim, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary (Public Affairs)."

Mr. Friedheim could not be reached for comment on the matter today, but another Pentagon spokesman, acknowledging that the Defense Department had received a letter from Mr. Neier criticizing the direc-

utive, said: "It wouldn't be appropriate for us at this time to comment on the contents of the letter. We are preparing a reply."

Reached at an office of The Civil Liberties Union here, Mr. Neier said of the Pentagon message: "It's an incredibly sweeping order, and it displays not the slightest sensitivity to the fact that people who go into the Defense Department retain constitutional rights."

"It sounds like an off-the-top-of-head order," Mr. Neier continued. "I can't imagine that anybody gave any thought to it in the Defense Department—and it would be nice if these things were done with some realization that they have an important impact upon soldiers."

### Clarification Urged

In his letter, which was addressed to Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird, Mr. Neier called on the Secretary to rescind the directive, adding: "If the Department of Defense wishes to limit official pronouncements to authorized spokesmen, that is certainly appropriate, but there can be no possible justification for suspending the civil liberties of millions of citizens who are employed by the Defense Department."

Mr. Neier also said: "The A.C.L.U. calls upon you to issue a statement to all military and civilian employees of the Department of Defense which explicitly recognizes that they do not become second-class citizens when they enter government service, and that they retain the freedoms guaranteed to them by the United States Constitution."

Pentagon officials said privately today that the directive had not been rescinded and that no statement had been issued in response to Mr. Neier's appeal.