

# The Real Goliath in Viet

## Washington

In its continuing drive for more military aid from Congress to bolster the sagging military fortunes of the Saigon government, both the White House and the Pentagon have portrayed North Vietnam as a Goliath supplied by the Communist bloc and bullying a South Vietnamese David.

The facts, however, show that it may instead be a case of a northern David

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bullying a southern Goliath. According to figures from congressional and Pen-

tagon sources, the South Vietnamese:

- Outnumber opposing forces in every area of the country, and by 5-to-1 in the critical Saigon area.
- Had nearly twice as much artillery ammunition stockpiled as the Communists.
- Have more than twice as many heavy artillery guns.

Last week it was revealed that the official limit of \$700 million on U.S. military aid for the Saigon government this fiscal year was misleading, because the total does not include more than \$1 billion in military arms sales. Earlier this week, it was learned that even more military aid is flowing to Saigon under a Pentagon plan that merges all Indochina military aid under one program, allowing "transfers" of arms from one nation to another.

All this raises serious questions about the administration's contention that the South Vietnamese are losing

ground only because they are being overwhelmed by superior numbers of forces equipped with greater amounts of arms.

South Vietnam's clear numerical superiority in every category makes its near-total military collapse even more puzzling. As one Pentagon source put it, "If I

could give them a billion dollars right now, I'd get them some planes, but that's about it. There's no concealing the fact that if they can't do it with the sort of military capabilities they have now, they can't ever do it."

Republican Paul N. McCloskey Jr. (Rep.-Calif.), who recently returned from South Vietnam, says Saigon's military decline has little to do with the military capabilities of either side. "There can be only one answer for this situation," said McCloskey, a former Marine officer. "The aggressiveness, will and sense of purpose of the North, its leaders and its soldiers presently far exceed the aggressiveness, will and sense of purpose of their South Vietnamese counterparts." McCloskey noted that as recently as January, when the Communist offensive began, the U.S. ambassador to Saigon,

Graham A. Martin, told him that the South Vietnamese forces "can stand up to" the enemy and "has been doing so countrywide... acquitting itself well."

Martin's comment reflected the generally optimistic assessment of the South Vietnam's military capabilities by U.S. military and intelligence officials. Even throughout February, when

the South Vietnamese had already lost Phuoc Binh near Saigon despite overwhelming advantages in manpower and materiel, U.S. officials remained optimistic.

The optimism, now replaced by the pessimistic feeling that the South Vietnamese will be lucky to prevent the fall of Saigon, was based on the strong government advantages—on paper, anyway—in military strength. The most critical category is the number of

combat troops. Despite heavy North Vietnamese infiltration, the government retains superiority in manpower in every one of the country's four military regions, including Region I in the north, where government troops have been routed. Nationwide, South Vietnamese forces outnumber their opponents, 980,000 to 365,000.

The North Vietnamese total does not include nearly 220,000 support personnel—logistics workers, porters, **ammunition-bearers**—oper-

ating in Cambodia and Laos, nor 70,000 combat troops being held in reserve in North Vietnam. The South Vietnamese total does not include its Air Force, which has more than 200 planes and armed helicopters.

The South Vietnamese also retain superiority in

critical areas of materiel. In armor, South Vietnam has 499 tanks and 874 armored personnel carriers, while the North Vietnamese have 665 tanks and no armored personnel carriers. In January, on the eve of the offensive, the South Vietnamese had stockpiled 125,100 tons of artillery ammunition and the Communists had 66,000 tons.

The North Vietnamese have been plastering some targets with heavy concentrations of artillery, leaving the impression that they are doing all the firing. In fact, the government has been firing nearly 20,000 tons of artillery ammunition a month, while the Communists have been firing about 4000 tons.

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