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**U.S. Says Arms Situation
In Vietnam Is Not Critical**

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WASHINGTON, March 27—The Defense Department said today that despite Congressional reductions in military aid, South Vietnamese forces were not critically short of either ammunition or fuel.

At the same time, Pentagon officials contended that Congressional cutbacks had contributed to the Saigon Government's military setbacks of recent days by forcing its troops—as they sought to conserve military supplies—onto the defensive.

Various Administration officials have been emphasizing that because of reduced funding, the United States has been unable to replace destroyed weapons and South Vietnamese Government units have been forced to cut back on ammunition and fuel. But the Defense Department said that it was partly because of these conservation measures that Saigon's forces had been able to

maintain adequate stocks of ammunition and fuel as they faced the current North Vietnamese drive.

For the fiscal year that ends on June 30, Congress has provided \$700-million in military aid for South Vietnam, half the amount requested by the Administration.

In the renewed debate developing over Vietnam policy, this Congressional cutback is becoming a controversial element as the Administration seeks to link South Vietnamese military reversals with Congressional reductions in military aid.

The Defense Department made public figures showing that over the last nine months, \$430-million in military assistance has been delivered to South Vietnam, including about \$200-million in ammunition.

Of the \$700-million appro-

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riated by Congress, the Defense Department has already committed \$525-million, with \$94.7-million of the orders still in the pipeline to South Vietnam. The remaining \$175-million will be committed next week to cover the final three months of the fiscal year.

Contrary to the assertion by Secretary of State Kissinger yesterday that because of the Congressional reductions, American aid had been limited to ammunition and fuel, the Pentagon figures showed that a substantial amount of spare parts had been ordered to keep American-furnished weapons in operation.

Breaking down the \$525-million obligated thus far, the Defense Department said that \$67-million had gone for spare parts, \$205-million for ammunition, \$75-million for fuel, \$31-million for supplies, \$64-million for technical assistance and transportation and administrative costs. The remaining money is expected to be apportioned in roughly the same manner.

With about half the congressionally approved aid yet to be delivered, some members of Congress, like Senator Charles McC. Mathias Jr., Republican of Maryland, expressed the belief that the Pentagon figures demonstrated that Saigon's military situation could not be blamed on "niggardly" Congressional support, as Secretary of Defense James R. Schlesinger contended last week.

Defense Department officials put a different interpretation on the figures, stressing not so much immediate military needs as what they called the long-term erosive effect of the cutbacks.

The department said that because of "constrained consumption," South Vietnam's fuel stocks "are not critically short at this time." Maj. Gen. Winant L. Sidle, a Pentagon spokesman, said this also applied to South Vietnam's stocks of ammunition.

Pentagon officials main-

tained, however, that the lower level of American support had reduced the firepower, air support and mobility of the South Vietnamese forces. They thus drew a link between the reduced level of support and Saigon's decision to withdraw its forces from the Central Highlands to conserve supplies and forces for defense of the area around Saigon.

These officials point out, for example, that the supply of spare parts is less than 50 per cent of estimated requirements, that military vehicles and aircraft are limited to about 50 per cent of their past consumption of fuel, that consumption of ammunition has been curtailed and that the United States has been forced to cut back on its contractual maintenance of weapons. The result, they say, is that a significant proportion of South Vietnam's planes and helicopters are not being used.

Out of the Pentagon figures emerges a fact privately acknowledged by defense officials—namely, that the additional \$300-million in military aid requested by the Administration is not needed this fiscal year, but to build up South Vietnamese ammunition stocks, spare parts and maintenance assistance in the coming fiscal year.

The United States has been shipping ammunition at the rate of 12,000 tons a month, while South Vietnam has been consuming about 18,600 tons a month. One result is that South Vietnam has been drawing upon the large stocks of ammunition left by American forces when they withdrew in 1973.

Even with the Congressional reductions, American military aid to South Vietnam is apparently running about twice that of Chinese and Soviet military aid to North Vietnam. A recently prepared study by the intelligence community—not completely accepted by the defense department—contains the rough estimate that in 1974, the Soviet Union and China provided North Vietnam with \$400-million in military aid, including \$170-million in ammunition.