

Huge Loss MAR 29 1975 Of Arms by Viet Army

Saigon

The value of American military weapons and equipment lost over the past two weeks by the South Vietnamese totals more than \$1 billion, according to qualified Vietnamese sources.

The abandonment of hundreds of artillery pieces, trucks, ammunition, planes, mortars, tanks, armored personnel carriers and rifles — coupled with the rapid retreat of army units — is viewed by Vietnamese and Western sources as a stunning psychological blow for South Vietnam.

A senior Western official, who has spent more than a decade in South Vietnam, said: "These losses are very, very, very considerable. It's a catastrophic loss."

Another Western source said: "We're facing devastating failure."

An informed Vietnamese said that the Armed Forces Logistics Command has made a tentative estimate of at least \$1 billion in equipment losses — virtually all of it left over by the Americans — as a result of the government's abrupt decision to abandon two-thirds of the nation and the hasty, panicky civilian and army exodus that followed.

These losses are expected to be a key source of discussion between General Frederic Weyand, the U.S. Army chief of staff, who was sent here by President Ford to

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assess the deteriorating military situation.

Weyand and the U.S. Ambassador Graham Martin met yesterday morning with President Nguyen Van Thieu but there was no official report of what they discussed. Weyand is expected to remain here for several days.

As the scale of the military retreat became apparent, Western military analysts and Vietnamese sources expressed dismay at the lack of armed forces coordination, "the failure of leadership up and down the line," in the chaos that has engulfed army units beset with mass desertions as well as the huge loss of equipment to the advancing North Vietnamese army.

One intelligence source said: "There's been a complete loss of control by most of the army, by civilians. Self preservation is everything, there's total panic at Da Nang airport. It's become a tragedy that I just can't grasp."

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