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More, Newer Weapons for Saigo

Saigon

The United States, in its first apparent major change in the Vietnamization program in three years, has decided to give South Vietnam's army and air force more heavy wea-

pons and aircraft, military sources said yesterday.

Pentagon officials have decided the South Vietnamese need more tanks, long-range artillery and heavy machine guns, the sources said.

But in Washington, military officials played down the new weapons shipments as emphasizing the need to replace Saigon's losses from the North Vietnamese offensive. However, they did not deny that more arms were on their way.

PLANES

The sources said a decision had been made to equip the South Vietnamese air force with new F-5E fighter planes to give Saigon theoretical air superiority over North Vietnamese MIGs.

Under consideration is a plan to give A-4 Skyhawk fighter-bombers to the South Vietnamese for attack missions in close support of embattled troops.

The sources said the new Vietnamization program will replace the basic plan drawn up in 1969.

RESULT

The result of the new plan will be to set back the end of the modernization of South Vietnam's armed forces by at least six months and pos-

sibly much longer, the sources said.

Military sources said that American advisers would be needed to train the South Vietnamese army and air force on their new weapons. South Vietnam's armed forces also will have to be altered slightly to form new units for the new weapons.

In addition to the supersonic F-5E fighter planes, the United States has decided to give South Vietnam's army:

- More long-range artillery, including 155-mm. howitzers with a range of nine miles and self-propelled 175-mm. guns capable of fir-

ing about 17 miles.

- More M-48 tanks, the most advanced battle vehicle in South Vietnam's armed forces. The heavy tanks are considered superior to those used by the North Vietnamese. Saigon's army already has about 20 and had formally requested more. Their drawback is a relatively long training period for the crews before they can be used in action.

- More four-barrel .50-caliber machine guns, known in the military as "Quad 50s" or "Dusters." The guns are normally mounted on armored cars.

United Press

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U.S. Troop Level In Vietnam Is Near Nixon Goal

Saigon

United States troop strength in Vietnam last week fell to 39,200, just 200 men above the level ordered by President Nixon for the end of the month, military sources said yesterday.

The sources reported a drop of 3200 from the 42,400 Americans in South Vietnam at the beginning of last week.

Mr. Nixon ordered U.S. troop strength to be under 39,000 by September 1, and the new figures indicated the number of Americans will drop well below that figure by the end of the month, the sources said.

United Press