

Tensions Over Vietnam

Anxiety About the Next Steps Grows
As Washington Gets Gloomy Reports

by Max Frankel

Washington, May 1 - The impression is growing here that North Vietnam's capacities for sustained challenge in South Vietnam have been underestimated and perhaps misjudged as badly as they were during the engagements in Cambodia and Laos in 1970 and 1971.

..... The military estimate that reinforced the American negotiating position in secret talks with North Vietnam throughout 1971 was that South Vietnam had won a long respite from major enemy challenge, probably through most of 1972.

..... Respect for strength is what the President believes he achieved in Peking and what he credits for the new progress in arms control leading to his Moscow visit in three weeks. Those achievements are the ones he had hoped to emphasize in his bid for re-election, while Vietnam slowly faded from the news.

If the North Vietnamese can sustain their challenge in the months to come, it will upset that Presidential game plan. The early signs that the challenge will indeed be even greater than expected are said to be driving Mr. Nixon to private expressions of distress and anger.

.....