

SFChronicle

FEB 19 1973

# Doubts That Saigon Can Stop All-Out Red Assault

## Washington

Despite massive U.S. help and much self-improvement, Saigon's army is still too short on maintenance, supply and some transport to meet any fresh all-out Communist attack alone, according to a newly-released General Accounting Office study. A different view came from outgoing Defense Secretary Melvin R. Laird on January 8. He said: "The South Vietnamese now have the capability to provide

their own in-country security completely and totally."

The 150-page GAO report on "Logistic Aspects of Vietnamization-1969-72" was completed last November and takes account of the precease-fire surge in U.S. supply.

But the GAO, Congress's watchdog agency, suggests that with \$5 billion in U.S. equipment, President Nguyen Van Thieu's government has more materiel than it can properly manage alone — by U.S. standards.

"It is clear that the South Vietnamese will continue to require some foreign aid," the GAO investigators found, citing in particular a continued need for foreign (civilian) technicians to help maintain complex helicopters, C-130 transports, communications gear and tanks. For ammunition, oil, and spare parts, Saigon, like Hanoi, is dependent on foreign sources.

The Pentagon plan in 1969 was to help the South Vietnamese organize, train and manage their own modest counterpart to the withdrawing 450,000-man U.S. Army Logistics Command in Vietnam. By the end of 1972 the South Vietnamese were repairing, overhauling or rebuilding 93 per cent of their worn or damaged military items, from trucks to artillery pieces.

During Hanoi's April-June 1972 offensive, the GAO discovered, the South Vietnamese performed better than they could have in 1969.

But serious deficiencies remain:

- No "viable" preventive maintenance effort exists even in training.

- Technicians, managers and even trained clerks are in short supply.

- Thefts of truck tires, batteries and vehicle parts make "inventory control" a matter of guesswork.

The South Vietnamese, the GAO suggests, should remember that complex American supply systems are not "necessarily" the best for everyone. Saigon must eventually shape its own "tailored specifically to the Vietnamese environment," the GAO said.

*Washington Post Service*