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## U.S. Officials See a Vietnam Stalemate

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WASHINGTON, May 6—The North Vietnamese and the South Vietnamese continue to build up their military forces in violation of the 1973 cease-fire agreement, but the American intelligence community still sees military stalemate ahead — at least for another year.

Several officials said that intelligence estimates showed that Saigon's forces had a big lead as of January, 1973, and are improving, but that Hanoi's forces are improving faster and closing the gap in the quality of arms and mobility.

American officials believe that Saigon's real problem for the next year is not the likelihood of a major Communist offensive, but inflation. Running at the 1973 rate of about 80 per cent, inflation could create serious morale problems and undermine political support for the Thieu Government.

These nonmilitary factors are seen by the intelligence community, the officials said, as central to the outcome of renewed large-scale fighting.

### Key Military Issue

In the meantime, military sources and other officials said the key military issue was which side could bring more combat forces and firepower to bear on particular battles.

The latest intelligence report lists Communist combat forces in South Vietnam at about 180,000, including 30,000 to 40,000 Vietcong. In addition, there are about 80,000 North Vietnamese soldiers in Cambodia and about 90,000 in Laos, as well as 50,000 in reserve in North Vietnam.

They are opposed by about 360,000 South Vietnamese sol-

### Saigon's Forces Ahead but Hanoi Is Closing the Military Gap

diers. This does not include the large number of South Vietnamese fighter aircraft and helicopters.

The South Vietnamese forces, the sources said, are spread throughout the country defending villages and highways to cities. The North Vietnamese forces, on the other hand, do not have much territory to defend and are free to concentrate their forces in specific places when they are ready to fight.

### 'Amazing Road-Building'

The sources said, however, that Saigon forces could still be rushed into battle with helicopters to maintain a superiority in numbers.

But Saigon's advantage in mobility is gradually being offset by what officials call "Hanoi's amazing road-building program." Begun before the cease-fire and now known as Corridor 613, Hanoi's new highway within South Vietnam is 500 miles long, running from the demilitarized zone separating North and South Vietnam to 80 miles northwest of Saigon.

The corridor supplements the traditional infiltration route in Laos known as the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Unlike the trail, it is usable in all seasons, fully paved and mostly two-laned.

The significance of the corridor, the sources explained, is that Hanoi can now send soldiers, supplies, and arms to the southern reaches of South Vietnam in half the time of years past. Officials estimate that the

trip now takes 30 days.

Moreover, these officials say, the corridor has about 500 miles of feeder roads, extending at strategic locations into the South Vietnamese countryside.

### More Antiaircraft Guns

The corridor is defended, one military source said, by about double the number of antiaircraft guns that Hanoi had in South Vietnam before the cease-fire. This source also said that there was "some evidence" of radar-guided artillery and the SA-7 missile used by the Arabs in the recent Middle East war.

Along this new highway, the military sources said, the North Vietnamese have rolled 400 new tanks to add to the 200 already in the south, and have doubled their artillery. Adjoining the highway, these sources said, is a four-inch pipeline for oil and gas.

The officials also stressed the estimate of the intelligence community that Hanoi has stockpiled in South Vietnam six months to two years worth of arms and ammunition, measured according to the level of fighting during 1972.

The officials insisted that the quality of American intelligence on what is happening in South Vietnam was good. "We still have enough people spread around in consulates and we still intercept radio messages," one said.