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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

WEEKLY SUMMARY

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C O N T E N T S

(Information as of noon EST, 11 January 1968)

Far East

	<u>Page</u>
THE WEEK IN PERSPECTIVE	1
VIETNAM	2
There has been no Hanoi follow-up to Foreign Minister Trinh's statement of 30 December on the possibility of talks with the US. Viet Cong local forces were unusually active this week, particularly in the Saigon area. In the northern border areas, Communist main force units continued threatening maneuvers. Photography reveals the probable presence of cruise missiles in North Vietnam. In Saigon, Vice President Ky has reportedly added his voice to the growing criticism of President Thieu's lack of positive leadership.	

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FAR EAST

Hanoi is seeking to exploit the impact of Foreign Minister Trinh's statement that North Vietnam "will hold talks" with the US after an unconditional cessation of bombing and other "acts of war." The North Vietnamese have claimed that this statement has been warmly welcomed throughout the world and have denounced President Thieu for blocking openings to peace and for rejecting a coalition government with the Liberation Front.

These moves have stimulated widespread uneasiness in South Vietnam regarding the US attitude toward talks and a coalition settlement. Saigon leaders have reiterated their opposition to a coalition and the National Assembly has rejected any dealings with the Liberation Front. The South Vietnamese Government reportedly suspended a newspaper because it indirectly advocated the idea of a coalition.

A series of Viet Cong attacks last week within a 30-mile radius of Saigon and in the Hue and Da Nang areas probably were aimed in part at aggravating political unrest and uncertainty in the South by demonstrating the government's inability to protect these heavily populated areas.

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VIETNAM

Foreign Minister Trinh's assertion on 30 December that North Vietnam "will" talk with the US if all war acts against North Vietnam are stopped unconditionally has provoked wide speculation on possible changes in the North Vietnamese policy. So far, however, Hanoi has not chosen to elaborate on this statement. The Communists have carefully construed it as a reiteration of a long-standing position and not as a concession.

Although the modification in Hanoi's official position set forth in the Trinh statement seems motivated primarily by a desire to end the bombing and stall any major US escalation, it may also have been promoted in part by a desire to probe both for US negotiating terms and for signs of US willingness to modify its objectives in Vietnam.

The Communists may, for example, believe they detect modifications in the US position on dealing with the National Liberation Front. Hanoi has not commented explicitly on US statements about possible representation of the Front in future peace negotiations, suggesting that the Communists see these statements as a sign of greater US flexibility.

Meanwhile, rumors generated by the North Vietnamese state-

ment have sparked widespread uneasiness in South Vietnamese circles that the US might be preparing to open negotiations with Hanoi or to accept a coalition government in the South that would include the National Liberation Front. Both houses of the National Assembly have addressed themselves to this question during the past week.

High Saigon officials, moreover, have recently reiterated their opposition to any coalition government with the Front. Although the concern will probably not reach a level at which it becomes a critical factor in GVN-US relations, it could begin to affect the Vietnamese response to US initiatives on pacification and other nation-building activities in South Vietnam.

The Communists lost little time in capitalizing on the political unrest in South Vietnam. On 7 and 8 January, Hanoi radio and the Liberation Front condemned South Vietnamese President Thieu's opposition to a coalition government and attempted to contrast his negative attitude with the Front's more positive approach to the concept. While endorsing the coalition idea in general terms, the Front has not been very forthcoming in spelling out the details of an acceptable coalition arrangement.

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The Front's current political program, for example, offers to accept into the Front's ranks almost anyone willing to support its objectives. This has been a long-standing policy, however, and one designed more to broaden popular support than to present a precise proposal for a "coalition government" with disaffected Saigon officials. The new program recommends a future government established after general elections, but it is deliberately vague about the steps to achieve this. It does not commit the Front to negotiations with the present Saigon leadership for the purpose of forming a coalition government.

Although recently captured documents indicate that the idea of a coalition has been discussed extensively within the Communist movement for several months, these discussions are also vague on details and timing.

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A new problem facing the Thieu government is the proffered resignation of General Nguyen Duc Thang, deputy chief of the Joint General Staff in charge of Revolutionary Development cadres. Thang's wish to resign apparently stems from what he considers foot-dragging on the part of the government in instituting vital reforms, including a reorganization of the armed forces, which would strip the corps commanders of much of their power base. Although Thang's resignation has been rejected, it still could prove to be a source of embarrassment if the press--which has lionized Thang--becomes aware of his resignation attempt and the reasons behind it.

Increased Military Activity in the South

Viet Cong guerrilla and local forces were active this week throughout South Vietnam.

A flurry of large-scale, enemy-initiated attacks occurred within a 30-mile radius of the center of Saigon. During a five-day period, four major actions occurred near the capital city, including two bold assaults on nearby towns. Most of these actions saw extensive enemy use of mortars, both preceding and during ground attacks. For example, some 600 mortar rounds were fired as part of a Communist attempt to overrun the capital of Hau Nghia Province.

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Intense enemy mortar and rocket barrages were also directed at strategic US and allied military installations elsewhere during the week. A US Marine supply base near Da Nang was struck by a 122-mm. rocket bombardment in a close follow-up of last week's heavy rocket attack on the Da Nang airfield itself. An attack on the US air base at Kontum in mid-week inflicted moderate casualties and extensive damage to aircraft and associated equipment.

This phase of the Communist winter-spring campaign has been marked by unprecedented enemy losses--a record 2,868 Communists were killed last week--as well as by an extremely high level of enemy aggressiveness throughout South Vietnam. It is possible that the enemy is attempting a particularly heavy show of force to gain the maximum psychological advantage with the populace prior to the Tet holiday that begins on 30 January. Communist military preparations, however, appear to foreshadow a resumption of major offensive action after Tet.

Communist main force units continue to pose a major threat in three border areas: western Quang Tri - DMZ, western highlands, and northern III Corps.

Enemy reconnaissance activities and probing attacks against many allied outposts in these areas have increased. Such actions may signal full-scale assaults on some of these outposts.

Possible Cruise Missiles in DRV

North Vietnam may have acquired short-range, surface-to-surface missiles intended for coastal defense. Possession of such weapons, if confirmed, would pose a significant threat to US warships conducting shore bombardment operations along the DRV coast.

Early January analysis of photography revealed two positions just south of Thanh Hoa which contain camouflaged equipment, including one object identified as probably an SS-N-2 missile and several possible rail-type launchers. This missile has a range of about 20 miles and was the weapon used by the Egyptian Navy on 21 October 1967 to sink the Israeli destroyer Eilat. The suspected sites were bombed repeatedly by US Navy aircraft on 5 and 6 January, but there is no firm evidence from photography or pilot reports that either site was occupied at the time of the attack.

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