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SUBJECT: Information on Chinese Nuclear Capabilities

1. Following is US Govt assessment of Chinese nuclear capabilities to be used at your discretion in orally briefing President Park. Assessment draws on latest NIE and has received approval and updating from CIA, but no mention of NIE should be made to Park, and briefing should be described as "assessment" rather than as estimate.

COMMUNIST CHINESE NUCLEAR CAPABILITIES

SUMMARY

China clearly aspires to great power status, and current Chinese leaders have given a high priority to developing a substantial strategic capability as essential to such status. If the Chinese make wise use of their limited resources--and resolve their internal political conflicts--they could make steady progress toward the achievement of these goals over the next decade.

A. Present Chinese Capabilities

1. At present Peking may have a few small-yield atomic weapons which

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could be delivered by existing Chinese bombers of the TU-4 or TU-16 type. They could also have a crude thermonuclear bomb with a megaton-yield for the TU-16.

2. We believe that the Chinese have developed an MRBM system in the 600-1,000 nm range, but we have no evidence that it has been deployed. Initial deployment could begin during the next year or so. When this system is operational, all Asian nations with the exception of parts of India and Indonesia would be within range of MRBMs deployed close to China's eastern and southern borders. We anticipate that the warheads initially employed would have yields under 100-kt.

3. The Chinese have demonstrated a capability to produce a thermonuclear device with a yield of several megatons. Although this device was not missile-deliverable, their last test in December 1967, which was not announced by Peking, apparently was an unsuccessful attempt to achieve a light-weight thermonuclear (TN) design as a step toward a weapon which could be missile-delivered by an ICBM or possibly an MRBM.

4. Peking has constructed one Soviet-type diesel-powered "G-class" submarine which is designed to fire three ballistic missiles. However, we have no evidence indicating that the Chinese have developed a missile system suitable for this single submarine./

B. Possible Developments

1. Weapons. We expect that Peking will continue to work toward the development of thermonuclear devices for ICBMs and lesser-range strategic attack systems.

2. Delivery Systems

a. MRBM. In 1969 enough fissionable materials should become available

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to allow the Chinese to deploy a limited number of MRBMs. By the mid-1970's Peking may be able to deploy as many as 100 MRBMs, some with TN warheads, in soft fixed sites.

b. ICBM. China is working on an ICBM and is capable of deploying one with a TN warhead and having a range of over 5,000 miles by the early or mid-1970's. This deployment could conceivably take place as early as 1971-1972, if the Chinese program encountered no major setbacks. The Chinese may decide to deploy their first ICBM at only a few sites by about the mid-1970's. Any large-scale Chinese ICBM deployment may await the availability of ICBMs with improved launcher survival, reliability, and accuracy.

c. Medium Bombers. China is considered capable of producing the Soviet TU-16 medium jet bomber, which has a combat radius of 1,650 nm. If Peking produces such aircraft, we believe that it could have about 50 or so operational by 1972.

d. Missile-launching Submarines. We have no evidence that Peking is presently constructing any additional ballistic missile submarines. China has shown some interest in nuclear-powered submarines capable of launching ballistic missiles. However, even if the regime has started research and development of such a vessel, we do not believe that the first unit could be operational until the late 1970's at the earliest.

3. Conclusion. The extent of actual progress will remain in doubt so long as political fanaticism and disorder continue to infect China. While we have evidence that disruptions associated with the Cultural Revolution have involved government agencies in the weapons field, we have no way of assessing precisely

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the effect of such disruptions on the Chinese advanced weapons program. In addition, China's progress in strategic weapons could be adversely affected if the regime attempts to do too much too soon.

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