

Washington: An Air of Crisis

By JAMES RESTON

WASHINGTON, Jan. 25— There is an air of crisis in the capital these days. The talk is of a harder war and maybe even of more war over the capture of the U.S.S. Pueblo in North Korea, but the anxious talk and the big headlines could easily be misleading.

It is not the strategic picture in Asia that is changing but the Administration itself. On the basis of the intelligence reports so far, there is no evidence that the Communists are trying to open up a "second front" in Korea. On the basis of reliable reports from knowledgeable officials, there is no basic change in the Government's plans for continuing the war as before.

Reserves' Call-Up

The call-up of 14,600 Air Reserves and Naval and Air Support units is not necessary to deal with the Pueblo incident. The call-up may be useful in supporting our diplomatic efforts to get the ship and its 83-man crew released, but the Administration has been under pressure to call these reserves for Vietnam, and that is where they are likely to be used in the end.

Nevertheless, the optimism

of the pre-Christmas period is now giving way to uneasiness for a variety of reasons. The enemy is obviously building up for a major assault on the U.S. Marine base at Khesanh near the demilitarized zone, and apparently has managed to bring up some large artillery guns for the purpose. The expectation here is that this may produce the biggest battle of the war in about a week, right after the Tet truce.

In addition, the crash of an Air Force plane in Greenland with four H-bombs aboard, the pressure on the dollar and the U.S. balance of payments abroad, the announcement that the British are pulling out of Malaysia and the Persian Gulf—all these in recent days have made people aware of the complexity and danger of America's military and economic problems across the globe.

None of these events has changed anything fundamentally, but they have made an edgy capital conscious of the possibilities of change. What if the Communists were bringing up new and longer-range weapons into the battle? What if they did create new diversionary guerrilla fronts along the vast Communist borderland from North Korea, through Laos, and Afghanistan to the

Persian Gulf and the Mediterranean?

It is the fear of the unknown, of more attacks and new longer-range weapons, rather than actual evidence of new enemy plans on other fronts that contributes to the uncertainty of the moment.

Also the Johnson Administration is itself being transformed. In the last few weeks, the President has received the resignations of Secretary of Defense McNamara, Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare John Gardner, and the heads of the Bureau of the Budget, Charles L. Schultze, and the Council of Economic Advisers, Gardner Ackley. There are persistent rumors that these will be followed before long by Secretary of the Treasury Henry H. Fowler, and the Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall.

The loss of McNamara, Gardner and Schultze, all wide-minded, objective and highly competent men, has not done anything to reassure the Capital. These are all non-political officials, who have had their doubts about the Administration's priorities or lack thereof, and while they have given up their key jobs quietly, the Capital cannot quite believe that their stated reasons for leaving told the whole story.

Anyway, whatever the rea-

sons, they are not going because the Administration is on the verge of ominous new policies they do not like. The tone of the Administration is clearly more political than it was just a few weeks ago, and being more political, it sounds more militant.

Clifford's Testimony

That was obvious in the testimony of Clark Clifford, McNamara's replacement at the Pentagon, on Capitol Hill today. He took the hard line on the bombing of North Vietnam. Where McNamara talked about "parity" of nuclear weapons with the Soviet, Clifford wanted "supremacy." Where McNamara had his doubts about nuclear powered surface ships, Clifford seemed to be for them. Where McNamara fought against a new family of big bombers to replace the B-52s, Clifford was sympathetic to the idea, and he was determined to stay in Vietnam until the Saigon Government was sure of maintaining itself against Communist pressure, which probably means indefinitely.

All this pleased the Armed Services Committee members, but it did nothing to reassure a capital that has absorbed too many changes and accidents and threats for comfort since the beginning of the new year.