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Note - 427

June 3, 1969

To : The Secretary  
Through: S/S  
From : INR - Thomas L. Hughes *by h.c.d.l.*

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Subject: Communist China: Peking Inflates Soviet War Threat

NCNA on June 2 published an unusually frank and pessimistic warning to the mainland Chinese population that the Soviet Union is preparing to launch a war against China which might involve nuclear weapons. At the same time, reports of rallies and meetings in communes and provincial cities stressing anti-Soviet war preparations suggest the regime is mobilizing a nationwide campaign on the theme. The campaign appears motivated by the need for an issue to coalesce internal unity; by a desire to blacken the Soviets on the eve of the international Communist conference; and, by no means the least, a genuine fear of attack.

Soviet Build-up Detailed. The NCNA article on the Soviet threat proceeded from the assumption that Moscow's statements of peaceful intentions concerning the border dispute masked aggressive intentions, and it put forth evidence of this in greater depth than previous Chinese propaganda dealing more narrowly with border clashes. It reported the existence of a chauvinistic clamor in the USSR for war against China, fanned by public media and leadership statements. It described Soviet military preparations including construction of new airbases and missile sites along the border, border maneuvers, "massive" conscription, increased troop deployments in the Far East, arming of settlers along the border and continuing intrusions into Chinese territory and airspace. Further, the article cited as Soviet military

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doctrine the necessity of relying on nuclear missiles and asserted that the USSR has "continually clamored" about missiles with nuclear warheads near Lake Baikal and in Mongolian territory aimed at China.

We are unaware of any Soviet missile claims with respect to the border areas, though Peking may have discovered the remarks of a local official or provisional commander susceptible to this interpretation. However, the Soviets did, shortly after the fighting on the Ussuri, threaten indirectly the use of nuclear weapons in a putatively "unofficial" Radio Peace and Progress broadcast. The USSR subsequently denied that this represented a nuclear threat to China.

Chinese Populace Told to Make War Preparations. Several anti-Soviet meetings in communes and provincial cities in the past ten days have incorporated the theme of war preparations, according to travelers returning to Hong Kong. The series of meetings evidently began soon after the publication of Peking's statement of May 24 which affirmed Chinese interest in settling the border dispute through negotiations. In addition to the public meetings, one informant reports that adult members of his commune will receive militia training two days a week as part of the war preparations, and another quotes a local cadre as predicting that the Third World War will break out in August or September. A third informant mentions required attendance of "secret" (i.e., closed) meetings sponsored by the local PLA and revolutionary committee to discuss preparations for the "forthcoming war against Soviet revisionism." In a different vein, a foreign businessman reports a conversation in Peking in mid-May with an official of the Chinese foodstuffs foreign trade organi-

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zation who claimed that China was stockpiling various goods because of the prospects for armed conflict with the USSR.

Mao and Lin on War. The NCNA article of June 2, like the PRC statement of May 24, concludes with a Mao quotation proclaiming that the Chinese do not wish to fight but if forced to do so will fight to the finish. In essence, this is not a new Mao-thought, but it does not appear in the little red book's collection of quotations in precisely this form. Its prominence in Chinese propaganda since the Ninth Party Congress suggests that Mao uttered it during the Congress in the specific context of the Soviet threat. Likewise, the most frequently quoted passage of Lin Piao's long published report to the Congress is his remark that if the enemy launches war, "we must be prepared." The enemy was identified as either the US or the Soviet Union, but it has become increasingly clear that it is the threat from the North that preys on Peking's mind.

Peking's Motives. Mass campaigns geared to war preparations are nothing new in Communist China, and the campaign which now appears to be building up is, like its predecessors, probably undertaken for a variety of reasons. Among these is the need to promote internal unity at a time of social and political upheaval. Political disunity, continued factional fighting, and disputes over personnel and policies continue to plague Communist China's new power structure.\* The Chinese also want to blacken the Soviet image

\* See Intelligence Note-410, "Communist China: Political Unity Lacking," May 26, 1969 (CONFIDENTIAL/NO FOREIGN DISSEM).

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abroad by portraying the USSR as an aggressor, a device which is particularly relevant on the eve of Moscow's bid for unity at the international conference of Communist parties.

But neither of these explanations is sufficient in and of itself. As in the autumn of 1965, when Peking feared expansion of the Vietnam war and launched similar "war preparations," the Chinese are probably now acting out of a combination of real fear of Soviet intentions and a sober calculation that national consciousness of the Soviet danger must be made manifest to Moscow and the world as an element of Chinese deterrence of the threat. Avoidance of direct confrontation with superior military power has long been a cardinal point of Chinese Communist foreign policy. The experience of the Korean War shows, however, that Peking is extremely sensitive to the presence of hostile forces on its borders and credible threats to its integrity, and is capable of reacting even when faced by superior power.

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