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Report by Four Chinese Marshals, Chen Yi, Ye Jianying, Xu Xiangqian, and Nie Rongzhen, to the Central Committee, 'A Preliminary Evaluation of the War Situation' (excerpt)

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Summary:

Four Chinese Marshals examine Sino-American-Soviet relations and analyze the possibility of an upcoming war. They assert that China must continue to develop as a strong proletarian country and an active player in the international arena, allying itself with neither the Americans nor the Soviets.

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Report by Four Chinese Marshals, Chen Yi,^[1] Ye Jianying,^[2] Xu Xiangqian,^[3] and Nie Rongzhen,^[4] to the Central Committee: "A Preliminary Evaluation of the War Situation" (excerpt),^[5] July 11, 1969

I. The struggle between China, the United States, and the Soviet Union.

The present struggle between these three powers is different from the ones between the "seven powers" before World War II or the American-Soviet confrontation in the early post-war era.

(1) China represents the fundamental interests of the world proletariat class. The Ninth National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party declared that China and the true Marxists-Leninists and the revolutionary people all over the world should fight resolutely side by side until "the system of man exploiting man is eliminated on the earth and that the whole mankind is emancipated."

(2) The U.S. imperialists and the Soviet revisionists are two "brands" of representatives of the international bourgeoisie class. On the one hand, they both take China as the enemy; on the other, they take each other as the enemy. U.S. imperialists and Soviet revisionists are hostile toward China, spreading slanderous rumors about China's "expansionist ambition." In fact, socialist China does not have even a single soldier stationed abroad.^[6] China's behavior during the last twenty years, especially during the war against the Indian invaders^[7] and the war to resist U.S. aggression and assist Vietnam, has fully proven that China has no expansionist intentions. In fact, the imperialists, the revisionists, and the counterrevolutionaries are not really scared by the so-called China's military aggression. What scares them most is the prospect that people's revolutions of all nations, under the guidance of the invincible Mao Zedong Thought, will send them to the grave. Therefore, the U.S. imperialists' and the Soviet revisionists' hostility toward China, in the final analysis, is hostility toward the Mao Zedong Thought, toward the revolutions in their own countries as well as the world revolution, and toward the people of their own countries and the people all over the world. However, it should be noticed that [Richard] Nixon takes China as a "potential threat," rather than a real threat.^[8]

For the U.S. imperialists and the Soviet revisionists, the real threat is the one existing between themselves. For all other countries, the real threat comes from U.S. imperialists and Soviet revisionists. Covered by the banner of opposing China, U.S. imperialists and Soviet revisionists collaborate with each other while at the same time fighting against each other. The contradictions between them, however, are not reduced because of the collaboration between them; rather, their hostilities toward each other are more fierce than ever before.

(3) The other countries, controlled by either the United States or the Soviet Union, are yet to become a force to contend with them. While only a few of them follow the U.S. imperialists and the Soviet revisionists to carry out an anti-China policy, the majority of them maintain a different attitude toward China. Some adopt a dual stand toward China; some maintain an onlooker's position; some use friendship with China to resist the attempts by the U.S. imperialists and the Soviet revisionists to control them; some resent U.S. and Soviet plots to re-divide the world and openly challenge them. As China becomes more and more powerful and the U.S. imperialists and Soviet revisionists become weaker and weaker, this situation will develop further, making it more difficult for them to form an anti-China united front, let alone to find hatchet men against China in military affairs.

II. Our opinions on the war against China.

We believe that in the foreseeable future it is unlikely that U.S. imperialists and

Soviet revisionists will launch a large-scale war against China, either jointly or separately.

(1) The U.S. imperialists do not dare to attack China rashly. The main reasons are as follows:

(a) The United States and China are separated by the vast Pacific Ocean. The U.S. imperialists' defeats in the Korean War and the Vietnam War have taught them a bitter lesson causing a deeper crisis both at home and abroad, thus forcing them to claim that they would never again be involved in wars similar to the ones in Korea and Vietnam. China is different from Korea and Vietnam, and the U.S. imperialists must be even more careful while dealing with China.

(b) The strategic emphasis of the U.S. imperialists lies in the West. The U.S. imperialists have been bogged down in South Vietnam, which has seriously weakened their position in the West. If they were to enter a war against China, it would last longer and the result would be more miserable for them. The last thing the U.S. imperialists want to see is involvement in a war against China, allowing the Soviet revisionists to take advantage of it.

(c) The U.S. imperialists wish to push Asian countries to the front in a war against China, especially by using Japan as the vanguard. Japan, however, does not dare to take reckless actions, not only because it suffered seriously in the defeat of its aggression against China, but also because the strength of the new China today is much stronger than that of the old China. Japan's strength is becoming full-fledged. Although Sato Eisaku^[9] and his like raise an anti-China hullabaloo, their actual intentions are to make money through the anti-China war propaganda, to recover Japan's lost territory occupied by the United States and the Soviet Union, to expand southward, to pursue a leadership role in Asia, and to contend with the United States and the Soviet Union. Japan is unwilling to serve as the scapegoat in a war against China, and the U.S. imperialists are even less willing to do so.

Therefore, it is unlikely that the U.S. imperialists will rashly launch or enter a war against China.

(2) The Soviet revisionists have made China their main enemy, imposing a more serious threat to our security than the U.S. imperialists. The Soviet revisionists are creating tensions along the long Sino-Soviet border, concentrating troops in the border area and making military intrusions. They are creating anti-China public opinion [in the Soviet Union], creating chaos on the international scene, while at the same time forcing some Asian countries to join an anti-China ring of encirclement with a stick-carrot method. All these are serious steps that the Soviet revisionists are taking toward preparing for a war of aggression against China. However, before they can enter a major war with China, the Soviet revisionists still must deal with many concerns and difficulties.

(a) Both China and the United States take the Soviet Union as their enemy. The Soviet revisionists thus does not dare to fight a two-front war. In appearance, the U.S. imperialists are taking a hands-off policy toward the Sino-Soviet dispute, claiming that they will neither take sides nor intervene. In reality, however, they are relaxing their relationship with the Soviet revisionists in the West, and pushing the Soviet revisionists to stand on the first front of a major war against China. By "sitting on top of the mountain to watch a fight between two tigers," they will see the weakening of both China and the Soviet Union. They may even use this opportunity to take over East Europe, or even press forward to the heart area of the Soviet revisionists.

(b) If the Soviet revisionists decide to launch a large-scale attack on China, they will

try to fight a quick war. Or they may follow the example of Japan's aggression against China, adopting a strategy of encroaching on China piece by piece, so that they will have time for rectification, as well as to observe the reactions of the U.S. imperialists and other countries. But, once they start a major war against us, we certainly will not allow them to fight a quick war and achieve quick results. We will not give them any breathing spell or freedom of action, and will act in accordance with Chairman Mao's teaching to "fight to the end." We will change the war into a protracted ground war. This will create great difficulties for the Soviet revisionists:

First, the Soviet revisionists' anti-China policy is without any popular support. As of now, they have used defensive excuses to deceive the people. If they are to launch an all-out offensive against China, they will arouse the people's opposition. In addition, the Soviet revisionists have carried out propaganda emphasizing the terror of war for many years, which may produce negative impact upon their attempt to start a war.

Second, the main industry of the Soviet Union is distributed in its European part. It is difficult for the Soviet revisionists to get supplies in Siberia, and everything must be transported from Europe. There is only one railroad. An exhausted army on a long expedition cannot last long. At present the revisionist Soviet Union already faces great shortages of daily necessities. It is even more difficult for it to hold on in a war.

Third, in order to win a war, a consolidated rear is indispensable. The rear area of the Soviet revisionists is far from consolidated, where domestic class and national contradictions have been intensifying. A war of aggression against China is inevitably a long-lasting one, and changes are inevitable over a long period, of which the worst will be troubles emerging in the rear area; when the problems on the front have not been solved, troubles at home break out. If American military forces penetrate the Soviet revisionists' spheres of influence in Europe, they will be bogged down there.

(c) We believe that, like the U.S. imperialists, when the Soviet revisionists are moving their troops eastward, it does not mean that their strategic emphasis is also moving eastward. The strategic emphasis of the Soviet revisionists remains in Europe. East Europe is the Soviet Union's main market and defensive barrier, on which it will never let down its guard. To be sure, the Soviet revisionists indeed are preparing for a war against China. But their main purpose is to use the military mobilization to consolidate their political control and to suppress the resistance to them at home and in East Europe. They are making a show of readiness to fight. This is designed, on the one hand, to serve their attempt to occupy a strong position to negotiate with us, and, on the other hand, to convince the U.S. imperialists that they really intend to fight a major war against China. They hope that this will bring stability to them on the western front, and that the U.S. imperialists will endorse their action of establishing an anti-China ring of encirclement. Consequently, they, with their expansionist attempts in Southeast Asia and other areas being covered, will be able to put their hands into the pockets of the Americans and the British and to redivide the world. The U.S. imperialists, on their part, are pushing the Soviet revisionists to attack China so that they may use this opportunity to take over the Soviet revisionists' spheres of influence.

(3) Will the U.S. imperialists and the Soviet revisionists launch a surprise nuclear attack on us? We must be fully prepared for this. However, it is not an easy matter to use the nuclear weapon. When a country uses nuclear weapons to threaten another country, it places itself under the threat of other country's nuclear weapons, and will thus inevitably face the strong opposition of its own people. Even the use of nuclear weapons cannot conquer an unbending people. In the final analysis, the outcome of a war will be determined by the continuous fighting of the ground forces. Therefore, nuclear weapons cannot save the U.S. imperialists and the Soviet revisionists.

(4) According to the current situation, it is difficult for U.S. imperialists and Soviet revisionists to attack China, either jointly or independently, or by gathering [on their side] such countries as Japan and India. In fact, when they argue for the need to attack China, either jointly or independently, they have other purposes in mind. In reality, they know that it is not easy to bully China, and once they are bogged down in China, it is not easy to get out. Both the U.S. imperialists and the Soviet revisionists want others to take the lead, allowing them to take advantage by hiding in the back. We are ready in full battle array. No matter how the aggressors will come, jointly or independently, they will be thoroughly defeated.

III. Analyzing the American-Soviet contradiction.

(1) The Soviet revisionists have adopted a "one-leg" policy in the construction of their country. They first pursued partial development in heavy industry, and then pursued a deformed development in advanced military industry. This provided them with the capacity for expansion. The U.S. imperialists have been trapped in South Vietnam, and the British imperialists have decided to withdraw from areas east of the Suez Canal, which has created a new opportunity for Soviet expansion. The Soviet revisionists also carry out expansion in the name of anti-imperialism or under the cover of opposing China. They often begin with the vulnerable spots, occupying grounds in North Africa, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia. They even have extended their hands into the U.S. Imperialists' backyard: Latin America. One of the most conspicuous indications of Soviet expansionism is the all-out effort to develop a navy. The ocean was controlled by the United States and Britain in the past, and the Soviet revisionists are vigorously expanding in the ocean, causing conflicts with the capitalist-imperialists.

(2) The expansion by the Soviet revisionists has been conducted for the purpose of squeezing out the U.S. imperialists. The Soviet revisionists hope to divide the world equally with the U.S. imperialists, as well as take charge of world affairs together with the U.S. imperialists. The U.S. imperialists are determined to maintain their superior position, and are unwilling to give up their hegemony and the world hegemon's position. The U.S. imperialists will not allow the Soviet revisionists to consolidate their position in the Middle East. The U.S. imperialists do not believe that the Soviet revisionists will really enter a major war against China, and they thus will not allow the Soviet revisionists to expand at will.

(3) Both the Soviet revisionists and the U.S. imperialists are making plans for action now. The Soviet revisionists want to extend their influence into Western Europe, and the U.S. imperialists hope to put a leg into Eastern Europe. They give tit for tat, competing to seize what is possessed by the other side. What exists between them is a real and concrete conflict of interests. The struggles between them are both constant and severe.

(4) Both the U.S. imperialists and the Soviet revisionists face crises at home and abroad, but they will not shrink back simply because they are facing difficulties. The Soviet revisionists are making active preparations in the East, not relaxing efforts in the West, and hoping to develop in the South. The U.S. imperialists also want to pursue a path of expansion. It is necessary that the contradictions between them will intensify.

(5) The contradictions between the United States and the Soviet Union concentrate on Europe and the Middle East. The unification of Germany is the core of the European problem. The strength of West Germany has been increasing. Eastern Europe was Germany's traditional market, and at present, the influence of France has reduced to a certain extent. In the Middle East, the conflict between Arabic countries and Israel has been characterized by an indirect confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union. In Europe, if the contradictions develop further, the

possibility cannot be excluded that a conflict might happen between the United States and the Soviet Union. We must pay close attention to this development.

We have made full preparations, and we are ready to defeat any enemy who dares to invade our territory. However, it is more beneficial to us to postpone the war. We should make full use of time and strengthen preparations in all respects, "making revolution, while promoting production, promoting our work, and promoting war preparation." We must promote the continuous great leap forward of our industrial and agricultural production, build China into an unshakable proletarian country with stronger economic power and stronger land, naval and air forces. In the struggle against the enemy, we should adopt a military strategy of active defense and a political strategy of active offense. We should continue to expose and criticize the Soviet revisionists and the U.S. imperialists. We should enhance our embassies and consulates in other countries, and actively carry out diplomatic activities. We should expand the international united front of anti-imperialism and anti-revisionism. We should strive for greater victory in the struggle against the U.S. imperialists and the Soviet revisionists.

[1] Chen Yi was one of China's ten marshals in the 1950s and 1960s. In 1969, he was China's foreign minister and a member of the CCP CC. He had been a member of the CCP Politburo from 1956 to 1969. During the Cultural Revolution, he was repeatedly criticized for his "rightist tendencies and mistakes," and, after summer 1967, his position as China's foreign minister became no more than nominal.

[2] Ye Jianying, a member of the CCP Politburo and vice chairman of the CCP Central Military Commission (which did not have a single meeting between March 1968 and early 1972), was another one of the ten marshals. During the Cultural Revolution, he was also criticized, especially for the leading role he played in challenging the Central Cultural Revolution Group in February 1967, known as the "February Counter Current" (eryue niliu).

[3] Xu Xiangqian, another one of the ten marshals, was then a member of the CCP CC and vice chairman of the CCP Central Military Commission. During the early stage of the Cultural Revolution, he was appointed the head of the PLA's Cultural Revolution Leading Group, but lost the position in late 1967.

[4] Nie Rongzhen, also one of the ten marshals, was then a member of the CCP CC and vice chairman of the CCP Central Military Commission. He had been in charge of China's national defense industry (including the building of China's A bomb and H bomb) and, during the Cultural Revolution, was the least criticized of the four marshals.

[5] After the CCP's Ninth Congress in April 1969, Mao Zedong instructed the four marshals to study the international situation together and to present to the Party's central leadership a written report. Zhou Enlai then assigned Xiong Xianghui, one of his long-time top aids, to assist the four marshals in preparing the report. From June 7 to July 10, the four marshals held six meetings for a total of 19 hours. On July 11, they completed this report and presented it to Zhou Enlai. Xiong Xianghui took detailed notes at these meetings. The excerpt of the report translated here is based on the material released in his memoir, "The Prelude to the Opening of Sino-American Relations," *Zhonggong dangshi ziliao* (CCP History Materials), no. 42 (June 1992), pp. 56-96.

[6] We now know, however, that China dispatched a total of 320,000 engineering and anti-aircraft artillery troops to Vietnam in 1965-1969. For a discussion, see Chen Jian, "China's Involvement in the Vietnam War, 1964-1969," *China Quarterly* 142 (June 1995), pp. 357-386.

[7] This refers to the Sino-Indian border war of 1962.

[8] The four marshals are probably alluding to Nixon's press conference remark of 14 March 1969. Nixon's reference to "a potential Chinese Communist threat" is cited in Raymond L. Garthoff, *Detente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan*, rev. ed. (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1994), p. 246, citing

Presidential Documents, vol. 5 (March 17, 1969), p. 404. The context for Nixon's statement was the new administration's announcement to proceed with an antiballistic missile (ABM) system, which had been justified by the Johnson Administration by the need to be prepared for a potential Chinese danger, and the implication that the Soviets, too, had an interest in containing the Chinese threat: "I would imagine," Nixon said, "that the Soviet Union would be just as reluctant as we would be to leave their country naked against a potential Chinese Communist threat." We thank William Burr (National Security Archive) for alerting us to this quotation.

[\[9\]](#) Sato Eisaku served as Japan's prime minister from 1964 to 1972.