

FRIAS-conference

'Interkit': An International Against China? Policy Coordination and National Interests in the Soviet Bloc in the Second Half of the Cold War

Freiburg, May 12-13, 2011

The intricate details of the Sino-Soviet Split have been the subject of considerable research and were in no small part brilliantly illuminated by two fairly recent works by Sergey Radchenko and Lorenz Lüthi.¹ The split would last into the 1980s and almost boiled into a 'hot war' during repeated border skirmishes along the Ussuri River in 1969. Indeed, while the ideological, political and even military aspects of Moscow-Beijing tensions have been analysed in great detail, very few studies exist on how exactly Moscow was able to keep its allies in the 'fraternal parties' in an anti-China camp during the Split. In this purpose, *Interkit* (derived from the Russian word for China, "*Kitai*"), first convened in Moscow in 1967, served as a forum where the International Department of the Soviet Politburo essentially tried to dictate the China policies of respective allied states.² After Claudie Gardet's³ and David Wolff's⁴ initial research into the subject, substantial interest and attention has arisen and been dedicated to the exploration and study of this topic.

An international consortium of scholars has now emerged which have pooled their resources and findings together in the hopes of constructing a flowing, all-encompassing narrative of the different aspects of Interkit. David Wolff at the Slavic Research Centre (SRC) of Hokkaido University in Japan, Péter Vámos at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Shen Zihua at the East China Normal University in Shanghai, the Cold War International History Project (CWIHP), the Freiburg Institute for Advanced Studies (FRIAS), along with a smattering of other academic institutions, are now quarterbacking an effort to illuminate the Interkit phenomenon with archival material gathered from not only former Warsaw Pact states but also Soviet Asian allies such as Mongolia as well as the U.S. and China. The group's initial findings have now been published in a CWIHP working paper.⁵

Building on conferences dedicated to exploring Sino-East European relations/Interkit organized in Beijing in 2004⁶ and Budapest in 2003 and 2010, a two-day conference hosted

¹ Lorenz Lüthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split: Cold War in the Communist World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008); Sergey Radchenko, *Two Suns in the Heavens: The Sino-Soviet Struggle for Supremacy, 1962-1967* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009)

² The first Interkit meeting, convened in Moscow on December 14, 1967, was attended by representatives of the International Departments of the communist parties of the Soviet Union, GDR, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Hungary, and Mongolia. See records of Interkit meetings, ETH Zurich's Parallel History Project on Cooperative Security (PHP) (<http://www.php.isn.ethz.ch/collections/colltopic.cfm?lng=en&id=19550&navinfo=16447>)

³ Claudie Gardet, *Les Relations de la République populaire de Chine et de la République démocratique allemande (1949-1989)* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2000)

⁴ David Wolff, *Interkit: Soviet Sinology and the Sino-Soviet Split, 1967-1986* (Russian History 30,4 (2003)

⁵ James Hershberg, Sergey Radchenko, Péter Vámos, David Wolff; *The Interkit Story: A Window into the Final Decades of the Sino-Soviet Relationship* CWIHP Working Paper 63

⁶ See Xiaoyuan Liu and Vojtech Mastny, eds., *China and Eastern Europe, 1960s-1980s* (Zurich: Zürcher Beiträge Nr. 72, 2004).

by Dr. Péter Vámos, sponsored by the Freiburg Institute for Advanced Studies (FRIAS), the Centre for Cold War International History Studies at the East China Normal University in China as well as the SRC and CWIHP, was held in Freiburg in the hopes of further shedding light on the intricacies of Interkit.

A variety of papers were presented by regional experts in order to compare and contrast the different perceptions of Interkit in former Soviet allied states as well as America and for the first time, the target of the Interkit meetings, China itself.

Indeed, Li Danhui and Shen Zihua's participation is the first time that Chinese scholars were able to present Beijing's considerations and views on events surrounding the '反华国际'. Based on extensive archival research in Chinese provincial archives, Li and Shen illustrated a thorough account of how Chinese relations with five Eastern European countries of the socialist bloc - namely Poland, Hungary, the German Democratic Republic, Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria - gradually deteriorated as the Sino-Soviet split reached new heights in 1965-69. Li and Shen's research has also reinforced the widely held belief that China pursued an explicit 'differentiation' policy towards Soviet allies in the hopes of driving a wedge between them and Moscow and attempting to lure them towards Beijing. While archival restrictions remain in place on most Chinese foreign ministry files until 1965, and even until then having only been released on a selective basis, Li and Shen have given this project new hope that Chinese foreign policy considerations towards Eastern Europe can be triangulated by using regional archives.

Even though Moscow's coordination of the China-policies of its client states must have seemed like a straightforward, academic process considering the political umbilical cords which attached most Soviet satellites to Moscow, disagreements did emerge at the conception of Interkit in 1967. David Wolff suggested that Moscow used a common Soviet-bloc initiative towards Vietnam to 'trick' Polish leader Gomulka into supporting the forum, thereby overcoming Gomulka's initial reservations at forming an explicit Anti-China coordination mechanism. That Poland under Gomulka, like the Romanians, had reservations about any sort of explicit Anti-China policy is no secret. Having opposed an initiative to include Mongolia in the Warsaw Pact in the early 1960s⁷, Gomulka, as Malgorzata Gnoinska points out, was very reluctant to get involved in the Interkit process due to economic and commercial considerations. This stance would only continue in the Gierek government, which often paid lip service to the Soviet Anti-China line, but never fully dismissed China as a trading partner. Moving from the slightly reluctant to the totally adherent, Oldrich Tuma and Jordan Baev respectively retraced the seeming blind willingness displayed by the Czechoslovak and Bulgarian Parties in following Moscow's anti-China stance during the Sino-Soviet split.

⁷ Lorenz Lüthi, *The People's Republic of China and the Warsaw Pact Organization, 1955-1963*, *Cold War History*, 7: 4, 479—494

Effective anti-China policy coordination during the Interkit period relied on rigorous research into the Chinese domestic environment, political conditions as well as its foreign policy imperatives. To fill the increasing demand for China-related studies, Péter Vámos recounted that research in Hungary and other closely cooperating bloc countries into the Middle Kingdom had already reached an advanced state in the early 1970s. Indeed, the analysis done by thinktanks in Soviet allied state had an influential part in forming the bloc's China policies. The value of this line of research was not lost on Moscow, as it regularly put together symposiums on China-related research and published analyses on China compiled by the fraternal states. In fact, most of the Eastern European policy-makers and ambassadors on the ground were experienced experts on China. It was therefore a special treat to have Romulus Ioan Budura, long-time Rumanian diplomat and former Rumanian Ambassador to China, provide the conference with an insider's account of how relations were constructed on the ground. As a long-time China-hand and a Qinghua alumnus, Budura's accounts on how his government ardently opposed China's excommunication from the socialist world as propagated by Moscow stood in direct contrast to most of the other presentations from the former fraternal states, who more or less followed Moscow's line towards Beijing.

The forum quickly lost its momentum and purpose in the late 1970s and 1980s as geopolitical conditions changed and Moscow's influence on its satellites started to wane due factors ranging from Brezhnev's declining health to the desire of Eastern European states to seek economic relations with an emerging generation of Post-Mao pragmatic policy-makers centred around Deng Xiaoping. Certainly, as Sergey Radchenko pointed out, Brezhnev's willingness to seek some kind of understanding with China as indicated by his 1982 Tashkent speech, as well as renewed Sino-Soviet political consultations in the same year, signalled a potential end in Sino-Soviet tensions. Amidst this trend, Oleg Rakhmanin, the first Deputy Director of the International Department for Relations with Fraternal Parties from 1968 to 1985, who was, jointly with Mikhail Sladkovskii, Director of the Institute for Far Eastern Studies from 1966 until 1985 – the two people mainly responsible for the creation and continuation of the forum – tried desperately to keep Interkit meetings relevant. These efforts yielded little results, as key Soviet client states such as the GDR, had, as Bernd Schäfer argued, already lost all taste for Moscow's anti-China line and sought their own accommodations with Beijing in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

The conference brought together a core group of dedicated scholars, many of whom having worked together on this project since its inception. During the proceedings, some of the questions by distinguished commentators such as Chen Jian, Sabine Dabringhaus, Stefan Plaggenborg as well as James Hershberg outlined some of the crevasses in the Interkit story that still need exploring. For example, there seems to be some disagreement on exactly how heavily economic considerations weighed on the mind of Warsaw Pact leaders when weighing the pros and cons of adhering to Interkit vs. normalizing relations with China in the late 1970s/early 1980s. Also, should Interkit be viewed as a 'third generation' coordination

mechanism after the Comintern and Cominform? Or was it simply one of the many working groups which existed in the CPSU International Department?

Arguably the most basic question is if Interkit *mattered* in the China policy-making processes of Warsaw Pact countries. By providing thorough accounts from previously classified sources from the different corners of former Soviet-bloc states, the participants of this conference have done a substantial part to answer this fundamental question with a resounding “*Yes, it did matter*”. It is the hope now that continued research into this topic will further reveal the hitherto little-known intricacies of this intriguing Soviet policy-coordination mechanism towards China.

Conference overview:

DAY 1:

Welcome and Introduction: Péter Vámos (Hungarian Academy of Sciences/FRIAS)

Panel 1 – The Sino-Soviet Split in a Global Perspective, With a Focus on Eastern Europe

Chair: James G. Hershberg (George Washington University)

David Wolff (Hokkaido University): *The Soviet Union, Sino-Soviet relations and Eastern Europe*

Li Danhui/Shen Zhihua (East China Normal University): *China, Sino-Soviet relations and Eastern Europe*

Malcolm Byrne (National Security Archive at George Washington University): *The US, the Sino-Soviet split and Eastern Europe*

Comments:

Sabine Dabringhaus (University of Freiburg)

Chen Jian (Cornell University)

Discussion

DAY 2:

Panel 2 – Sino-Soviet Relations and the Soviet Bloc/ I. East German, Polish, Czechoslovakian, and Mongolian Perspectives

Chair: Sabine Dabringhaus (University of Freiburg)

Bernd Schäfer (Woodrow Wilson International Centre for Scholars): *GDR*

Malgorzata Gnoinska (Troy University): *Poland*

Oldrich Tuma (Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic): *Czech Republic*

Sergey Radchenko (University of Nottingham, Ningbo Campus): *Mongolia*

Comments:

Stefan Plaggenborg (Ruhr-University of Bochum)

Sören Urbansky (University of Freiburg)

Panel 3 – Sino-Soviet Relations and the Soviet Bloc/ II. Hungarian, Bulgarian, and Romanian perspectives

Chair: Stefan Plaggenborg (Ruhr-University of Bochum)

Péter Vámos (Hungarian Academy of Sciences/FRIAS): *Hungary*

Jordan Baev (Georgy Rakovsky Defence and Staff College, Sofia): *Bulgaria*

Romulus Ioan Budura (Bucharest): *Romania*

Comments:

James G. Hershberg (George Washington University)