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Garret Martin. "Playing the China Card? Revisiting France's Recognition of Communist China, 1963-1964." *Journal of Cold War Studies* 10:1 (Winter 2008): 52-80. doi: 10.1162/jcws.2008.10.1.52. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1162/jcws.2008.10.1.52> .

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Reviewed by **Helen Parr, Keele University**

Following from his Ph.D. thesis, *Untying the Gaullian Knot: France and the Struggle to Overcome the Cold War Order, 1963-8*, Garret Martin has produced a detailed and interesting account of the French decision in January 1964 to recognise the People's Republic of China (PRC). Martin's work is multi-archival. He draws on published sources in *Documents Diplomatiques Français* and *Foreign Relations of the United States*, but mainly utilises documents from the Ministère des Affaires Etrangères at the Quai d'Orsay, the Papers of the Presidency in the Archives Nationales in Paris, as well as papers from the United Kingdom National Archives, the United States (U.S.) National Archives, and the Lyndon Johnson library. Martin shows a thorough grasp of French and English language literature on French foreign policy, and English language works on China in this period.

Martin's central argument is that de Gaulle was motivated by a desire to enhance France's prestige and to transform the Cold War, but he also sought to bolster France's influence throughout the Third World and particularly in Indochina. The article explains that de Gaulle was interested in the establishment of relations with the PRC from an earlier date, but that he could not act until the Algerian war had ended. The resolution of the Cuban Missile Crisis, after which de Gaulle concluded that neither superpower wanted war, also freed him to take the risk. Moreover, tension between Russia and China would one day lead to China's domination of Russia, or to a fight between the two, and 'the communist camp will crumble' (59). De Gaulle believed that history presaged the end of bipolarity and that France should act 'like a man who managed to move an enormous rock with a simple lever because he was able to place it at the point of equilibrium' (79). The gradual extension of cultural and economic contacts between France and the PRC in the early 1960s made such a pivotal role more plausible.

The French were also encouraged to turn East by developments in Western Europe. Once de Gaulle had opposed Britain's entry to the European Community, rejected America's offer

of Polaris missiles, and failed in his efforts to establish a political Europe founded on the Franco-German axis, he could divert his attentions to the extra-European. For the PRC, diplomatic relations with France would contribute to Mao's global vision and could help to split the imperialist west.

The signature in August 1963 of the Limited Test Ban Treaty (LTBT) between Britain, the U.S. and the Soviet Union (USSR) spurred de Gaulle to initiate covert negotiations with the Chinese regime in September. De Gaulle perceived a connection between the interests of France and the PRC in their opposition to the LTBT, and in their opposition to the hegemony of the superpowers. The Soviet Union had signalled its intention to turn to the West, not to China, leaving Beijing to fear that Moscow would surrender to America. Furthermore, de Gaulle thought that the South Vietnamese sought a secret peace with the North. He regarded the PRC's aims in Indochina as defensive, and understood that a connection with the PRC was essential in order for France to have influence in Vietnam. Subsequently, de Gaulle dispatched Edgar Faure on a secret mission, writing personally to him to emphasise the importance of his journey. During the discussions, the Chinese stressed that they would only accept relations with France if the French broke relations with Taiwan. This was a step France preferred to avoid. However, acknowledging the importance of the question to Chinese leaders, Faure recommended to de Gaulle to accept the PRC's compromise position that France would break relations with the Republic of China (ROC) if the ROC took the first initiative. Although the Chinese hoped that rapprochement with France would provide a springboard into Western Europe, they also worried that the move would weaken China in North Vietnam, as Hanoi could question the PRC's commitment to the revolutionary cause.

Faure's mission went undisclosed, but at the same time the French wanted to raise the profile of China in the West in order to maximise the impact of their strategy, as well as to sow confusion about their intentions. Indeed, even the Quai d'Orsay was not certain what the General was planning. The Americans misjudged de Gaulle's intentions, believing that he might choose to concentrate his efforts on West Germany. Why then, Martin asks, did de Gaulle and the Chinese act so quickly to normalise their relations, following the successful completion of Faure's mission in November 1963? Martin suggests that it is too simple to point exclusively to the recognition of China as the first move in de Gaulle's strategy of détente with Eastern Europe, as at this time he was still uncertain about the viability of better relations with the Soviet bloc. Rather, de Gaulle hurried towards recognition because of the possibility of a peace opening in Indochina, as the Cambodians appealed to France for assistance. De Gaulle viewed Cambodia as a potential example of neutrality for the whole of Vietnam. Once the path to the establishment of diplomatic relations was open, the French let their allies know what would ensue. The Americans reacted with anger, realising that they could not constrain French foreign policy. Their attempts failed to stymie Sino-French relations by persuading Taiwan not to break relations with France.

Martin concludes that France's recognition of Communist China was an example of the capacity of middle-sized powers to act independently in the Cold War. De Gaulle hoped his actions would foster change in the international system by encouraging the transformation to a multipolar world. The opening of relations with the PRC helped to improve France's

standing in the Third World, particularly later in Latin America, and enabled Paris to host the 1968 peace talks over Vietnam.

This article provides valuable access to material from the French archives and places it within its international setting. In so doing, Martin adds to the literature on French foreign policy by emphasising the connections between the global and the local – in this case French policy in Southeast Asia – in de Gaulle’s calculations. He thereby moves away from a debate on Gaullist foreign policy that is sometimes polarised between those who see de Gaulle as a visionary, and those who regard his intentions primarily as anti-American. Furthermore, by concentrating on a short time frame, Martin is better able to illuminate links between different aspects of French foreign policy, rather than dealing with them in isolation. This is a worthwhile method, and one that raises further intriguing questions.

Traditionally, scholars of Western Europe have concentrated on the Cold War as a European and Atlantic phenomenon, but Martin’s research demonstrates the indivisibility of the European and the global Cold War. He points to the significance of China as the USSR and the U.S.A. moved towards détente, and hints at the ways in which the European Community could be brought into play in international politics. The view expressed in China that the European Community was a “coalition of governments....directed primarily against the United States” provides a rather different vision of the ‘West’ than that held in the Soviet Union (62). Martin contributes to academic work that challenges the idea of the Cold War as exclusively a conflict between the superpowers. He shows how a smaller power within one of the blocs could hope to influence the course of history. Hence, Martin’s article will be useful for scholars not just of French foreign policy, but also of the Cold War in this period.

Helen Parr is lecturer in International Relations at Keele University, U.K. Her publications include *Britain's Policy Towards the European Community, 1964-7: Harold Wilson and Britain's World Role* (Routledge, 2006) and “Saving the Community: The French Response to Britain's Second EEC Application in 1967,” *Cold War History*, vol.6, no.4, November 2006. She is working on Anglo-French nuclear collaboration during the Heath government, and is beginning a political biography of the Liberal Democrat peer, Shirley Williams.

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