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Marc Trachtenberg. *A Constructed Peace: The Making of the European Settlement 1945-1963.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999. xi + 402 pp. $75.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-691-00183-8.

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Note: H-Diplo recently ran a roundtable discussion on Marc Trachtenberg's book *A Constructed Peace: The Making of the European Settlement, 1945-1963*. The participants were Diane Shaver Clemens, Thomas Maddux, Tony Smith, and Odd Arne Westad. Each part of the roundtable will be posted to the Reviews website as an individual review, with Trachtenberg's comments linked to each individual contribution.

Most of us in the social sciences have an "imperial temptation" to exaggerate the importance of whatever subject it is we pursue, as if it alone were such a central theme of universal significance that all other manner of investigation should be subordinated to ours, "the greatest story ever told." The temptation arises, I think, from the long, solitary hours spent putting the pieces together of the historical puzzle, and the excitement of seeing in new and persuasive ways the logic of events. Still, the temptation is misleading when it convinces us we understand more than we actually do.

Armed with this belief, I resisted from the first Marc Trachtenberg's claims that to study Germany was to come to grips with "the mainspring of the Cold War," or again that the Berlin Crisis of 1958-62 was the "central crisis of the Cold War" (55, 247), or finally that by 1963 a "settlement" had been reached that effectively meant that thereafter the greatest dangers of war due to Soviet-American enmity had finally been dissipated (or a "near-settlement" 378, a "settlement of sorts" 382, for as he explains 398ff, it took a while for the terms of the settlement to be fully manifest to all concerned). But in time, his evidence wore down at least a part of my resistance. I still think Trachtenberg's claims are clearly exaggerated, yet at the conclusion of the book, I found myself persuaded that he had made a powerful argument that helped me reconceptualize significant aspects of the period in line with his analysis.

For me, the most valuable parts of the book were chapters 5-9, the Eisenhower and Kennedy years. I was unaware of the depth of Eisenhower's conviction that the United States should prepare to devolve power (including nuclear weaponry) onto what Kennedy (with far less conviction) named the "European pillar of NATO." And I had

failed to grasp the skill with which the Kennedy administration conducted a German (and West European) policy that ultimately produced the "near settlement" of 1962-63 not only with Moscow but also with its NATO allies. I also like the "constructed" parts of Trachtenberg's analysis -- the way he shows us (sometimes more clearly than it must have been at the time, especially in his discussion of James Byrnes in chapter 2) the often messy way decisions were made, or what other decisions might have been forthcoming. Finally, I agree with Trachtenberg's point that his essential argument is confirmed by the way the collapse of the Soviet empire in 1989 took place with a reaffirmation of the agreement reached more than a quarter of a century earlier: that Germany should remain non-nuclear and safely contained within the structure of NATO.

But perhaps I am persuaded by Trachtenberg's argument because of my relative ignorance of this period. I look forward to other commentaries on this part of the book. For I do have reservations with the issues I know better -- America's European policy in the immediate postwar years through the early 1950s, and the meaning of the Cold War in general.

Let us start with the matter of how the Cold War started and when it ended. In his opening pages, Trachtenberg seems to me to succumb to the writer's imperial temptation of making the German Question more critical in the initiation of the Soviet American rivalry than in fact it was. He concedes at least some significance to the tensions over Poland, though he undercuts the importance of this country when he writes, quite mistakenly in my view, that by May 1945 the U.S. "more or less gave up on trying to save democracy in Poland" (13), and when tells us that the Declaration on Liberated Europe "had not been meant to be taken at face value" (11). And he acknowledges as well the importance of Bruce Kuniholm's 1980 argument that the Cold War started over questions in Iran and Turkey, not over Germany (35ff). But I would like to argue that had the German Question not existed (had, for example, U.S. forces somehow conquered all of that country in 1945 as they did Japan), the Cold War nonetheless would have broken out. I find it very hard to swallow, then, when Trachtenberg opens his book declaring "that the problem of German power lay at the heart of the Cold War..." Given not only the manifold differences between Washington and Moscow but also the problems born of the power vacuums that opened in so many parts of the world (after Europe and the Near East, in Northeast Asia especially), we should be careful about making inflated claims that our own focus of study alone explains the Big Bang.

Nor am I convinced by Trachtenberg's parallel assertion in his opening paragraph (never spelled out) that somehow the settlement of 1962-3 turned out to be "the key to the establishment of a stable international system in Europe, and ultimately in the world as a whole." I have heard similar claims made for the Cuban Missile Crisis (which Trachtenberg skillfully subordinates to the German Question), but I have never had a satisfactory answer to the objection that the magnitude of the breakdown of detente at the end of the 1970s (with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan after the American eviction from Iran, the Sandinista victory in Nicaragua, and the Soviet targetting of a new generation of intermediate range nuclear missiles on Europe, and particularly on West Germany) means that the 1980s are far too important to be reduced, as Trachtenberg would seem to have it, to the agreements of 1962-63, as if by then all had safely been put to rest so that later events are not to be taken too seriously. For me, the Cold War ended when common sense says it did: in 1989, and most certainly not in 1962-63. Especially for someone who prizes a "constructed" history, and who is therefore presumably aware of ambiguities, contradictions, new beginnings, and unintended consequences as well as clear-cut choices, how can Trachtenberg make the earlier

period so critical for events a quarter of a century later?

A second category of problems has to do with Trachtenberg's discussion of Germany in the early postwar years. From a political science point of view, Trachtenberg is a committed "realist." That is, for him what matters is essentially military power and the diplomacy that manages it. But to focus on these matters alone --"on fundamentals" as Trachtenberg puts it grandly (ix) -- is to miss a good part of the story of American policy toward Germany and Europe more generally.

For equally essential for creating a stable Europe and eventually ending the Cold War was the American decision to democratize Germany and to liberalize it economically. The original conception lay with Woodrow Wilson (whom Trachtenberg dismisses as leaving behind nothing but "pieties about democracy and self-determination" (11)), who understood first that U.S. security interests in Europe would best be guaranteed by a united Europe that absorbed German power into a greater unity rather than in a divided Europe of the kind the British had worked to insure well into the twentieth century. On all of this Trachtenberg has virtually nothing to say, although he might have done well to investigate further Stalin's famous dictum in 1945, which he cites in his book: "This war is not as in the past. Whoever occupies a territory also imposes on it his own social system. Everyone imposes his own system as far as his army can reach. It cannot be otherwise."

The second criticism, then, is that whereas Trachtenberg spends most of his long book talking about military realities, the Marshall Plan and the coming of what we now call the European Union is given short shrift indeed. Here was a blueprint for a stable Europe and the ultimate conclusion of the Cold War every bit as important --perhaps much more so -- than the diplomatic considerations surrounding nuclear power in the European theater. Yet Trachtenberg is apparently so unaware of this "second track" (if we consider military containment to be the "first track") that he speaks of European integration as if the idea rather accidently emerged in 1947.

So Trachtenberg cites Charles Bohlen in August 1947 declaring "the three Western zones should be regarded not as part of Germanay but as a part of Western Europe." Here Trachenberg remarks, "What an extraordinary comment! The fact that a top official could say that western Germany should not be regarded as part of Germany shows just how far U.S. policymakers had moved from traditional conceptions of how Europe was to be organized" (62-3). "Extraordinary" the idea perhaps was (and by the way, this is a word much overused in the text) but Trachtenberg apparently has little idea of what "traditional conceptions" were if he thinks this idea somehow first came in to existence when George Marshall scratched his head and wondered what he should say at his Harvard commencement address that year. Perhaps Trachtenberg should examine a bit more closely the history of American foreign policy before 1940.

In short, ***A Constructed Peace*** is a partial history, as all histories inevitably are. My disappointment is that the author succumbs to the imperial temptation and claims too much -- too much for Germany's position in the Cold War, too much for his own appreciation of America's German policy. I am nonetheless grateful for what I learned from chapters 5-9, where the place of Germany in U.S. military diplomacy is analyzed more fully and convincingly than I have seen it presented elsewhere.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at https://networks.h-net.org/h-diplo

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