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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

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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.

Let me open by congratulating Professor Trachtenberg on having written a first rate book of international history -- innovative, tightly argued, and well researched, this is exactly the kind of work that enables us to better discuss the overall interpretative issues in the field. Predictably, students love it -- it came out among the top ten books in a (highly unofficial) ranking made by the participants in my Cold War history seminar at LSE.

For the sake of debate, let me concentrate here on those aspects of Prof. Trachtenberg's interpretation with which I disagree. These generally fall along two lines: First, his assumption that policymakers East and West in the immediate post-war period would have been satisfied with -- indeed, at least on the US side, were aiming at (p. 34) -- a spheres of influence settlement in Europe; that the clash over Germany scuttled that settlement; and that it took up to the early 1960s for the United States to arrange 'a constructed peace' which both its European allies and its Soviet counterparts would recognize as satisfying at

least some of their interests. Second, his belief that the fear of an independent and re-armed German state drove Soviet policy toward Europe in the late 1940s and '50s. On the first line of argument, there is substantial evidence against. On the second, Professor Trachtenberg is almost certainly wrong.

As has been shown before (by Leffler, Messer, Lundestad and others), there were in 1945/46 groups within military planning and at State who aimed at a 'peaceful separation' of the former allies and avoided anything but "lip-service to Wilsonian platitudes" (Trachtenberg, p. 33). Byrnes may have had some sympathy with such views, but his performance as Secretary is certainly inconsistent on that point and seems, at least to me, to be dictated primarily by domestic political considerations. For President Truman and the great majority of his political advisers Wilsonianism, also with regard to Eastern Europe, seems to have been a very real perspective indeed. If the great majority of Truman's statements -- public or private -- during the first years of the Cold War have any explicatory value, the insistence on the universality of American political beliefs is what stands out clearly from them.

I therefore find it very hard to agree with Trachtenberg when he believes that US concerns over Soviet behavior in Eastern Europe could easily have been put aside by policymakers who were, in reality, aiming for spheres of influence and were willing to emphasize "national interests" (which, presumably, then, would also have to mean the interests of others). Where Trachtenberg sees a "dispute over demarcation lines" (p. 54); which was "of transient importance," I would see much of the origins of the Cold War. Although Truman (or any other Cold War president) was highly unlikely to go to war over Eastern Europe, he never accepted Soviet hegemony, and made its dissolution a precondition for normal diplomatic intercourse with Moscow. Stalin certainly fitted his part by being seen to challenge Western control over Iran and Turkey. But the significance of these events is that they verified a perception of Soviet actions in Europe which had been forming as the Red Army advanced during the latter phase of World War II, and which had profound ideological roots in the first part of the 20th century.

It is interesting that even in Trachtenberg's own account divisions over Germany play less of a direct role in causing the Cold War conflict -- it was, he notes, the result of confrontations elsewhere (referring to Iran and Turkey), rather than a product of a clash over Germany's future. Although he goes on to show -- rather convincingly -- how the German issue did indeed become a central part of the conflict, there is a problem here in terms of causality: if the confrontation over Germany did not create the Cold War, how come its settlement could create a Cold War 'peace'? To me, at least, Trachtenberg's trouble with this issue indicates that he defines both the causes and the conduct of the Cold War much too narrowly to be able to come up with a wholly convincing explanation.

On the second line of interpretation, the (still limited) evidence we have from Soviet, East-Central European, and German archives indicates that Stalin's main post-war preoccupation (in the short term) was not with German resurgence, but with the United States harnessing German production capabilities and military prowess for its coming confrontation with the Soviet Union. It is possible that Stalin's successors became increasingly worried about Bonn's intentions as Germany regained some of its political independence in the '50s. But even during the 1960s Khrushchev's focus is squarely on the United States when speaking about threats to Soviet security (see for instance his newly declassified interventions at the CC plenums), and the West German rearmament issue is, behind closed doors, primarily seen as a convenient propaganda weapon to brandish in order to attract sympathy from an historically conscious Western European public opinion.

Although I have concentrated here on disagreements, there is much to agree with in this book. Trachtenberg's contribution to the reevaluation of Eisenhower's role is important, as is his challenge to strictly bipolar explanations in terms of the development of key decisions within the alliances. I also agree with Professor Trachtenberg's emphasis on the need to understand what was some form of European settlement (or at least a beginning detente) in the early 1960s; although I believe that the causes of the reduced tension must be sought as much in the limitation of political mobilization in East; the variant forms of Communism in Poland & Hungary (& China); the economic stabilization in Western and Eastern Europe (and the connected reduction of class conflicts and of Western European Left and Communist Party links with the Soviet Union); and the increasing influence of Western Europe (and the FRG) within the alliance.

I also sympathize with the prescriptive side of Professor Trachtenberg's reinterpretation: that stable settlements should be achieved between very different (or, indeed, inimical) Great Powers through the hard work of statesmen who possess a well-defined set of their own interests and a clear-eyed understanding of the opponent's. We may be edging closer to a world in which international affairs consists of a series of universally recognizable rational transactions, although looking through the papers this morning (or any morning), I am not quite convinced. Even in the post-Cold War world one man's rationality is far too often another man's madness, and sometimes I even wonder if we have progressed much from the system dominated by two constructed ideologies, which both, in different ways, severely limited the abilities of political leaders to create a stable peace.