Correspondence

To the Editor:

I am grateful to *Orbis* for the opportunity to respond to Professor Marc Trachtenberg's essay. I say "essay" because it is mainly an exposition of his views on international politics and his reasons for disagreeing with certain of my conclusions, rather than a review of the history of European international politics from 1763 to 1848 that I wrote and on which my conclusions are based. That history is largely ignored, distorted, and even misrepresented, while the reasons he gives for rejecting my argument often demonstrate that he has misunderstood it.

It would take too long to give even a thumbnail sketch of the book's contents and various arguments here (of which the thesis about the balance of power is only one). I must confine myself mainly to comments on Trachtenberg's case: that I have failed to show that balance-of-power policies were behind the instability and breakdown of the eighteenth-century system, or that stability and peace in the Vienna era came from transcending balance-of-power politics. In fact, he claims, my own testimony shows that balance of power was an indispensable element of peace and stability in both eras.

As part of this case, he denies that the eighteenth-century practice of partitioning intermediary states like Poland was inherently destructive and destabilizing, and quotes me as admitting this: "Schroeder himself views the first partition [of Poland], in 1772, as an example of 'international cooperation,' a way for the great powers to settle important issues, a policy rooted in their 'shared interest in the maintenance of general peace.'"

Compare this with my actual verdict (pp. 18–19), where, having pointed out that Poland was here treated like African colonial territory in the late nineteenth century, divided up not because it was dangerous or even particularly desirable but simply as a convenient aid to the smoother functioning of the European system, I continue:

> This in turn says something profound about the eighteenth-century system. Like late nineteenth-century imperialism outside Europe, its rules made co-operative system-conforming conduct indistinguishable from naked aggression, at least from the point of view of the victims. Three great powers, perceiving their shared interest in the maintenance of general peace, discovered the best way to do so: to aggrandize themselves at the expense of a helpless third party. All . . . said, and really believed, that the system's requirements and rules permitted this. And they were right. The arguments they used conformed to all the eighteenth-century balance-of-power assumptions—indeed, to realist assumptions in any age. . . . The 'crime' of the first Polish partition rose directly from the rules and needs of standard eighteenth-century politics.

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There is more here than misrepresentation by selective quotation, turning my indictment of the first partition into an endorsement of it. It demonstrates Trachtenberg's inability to see how the rules and norms of eighteenth-century balance-of-power politics—with their emphasis on compensations, indemnities, relative advantage, honor and prestige, and the necessity and legitimacy of expansion by force if the opportunity presented itself—effectively rewarded aggressive conduct and punished restraint, so that if individual states tried to follow other rules, they only set themselves up for exploitation. When I characterize Austria, Prussia, and Russia as "expansionist, aggressive" states (another selective quotation), this is mainly what I mean: they were playing the only game in town, sometimes eagerly for profit, sometimes reluctantly or desperately for survival, but in any case unable simply to drop out or unilaterally change the rules.

Trachtenberg insists that "specific policies . . . were to blame, not the 'system,'" that states were not "trapped" by the system into doing what they were reluctant to do, that all the wars after 1802 were simply the result of Napoleon's aggression, and that my own account actually supports these assertions. First of all, I find it odd that a realist would so deny and downgrade the importance of systemic restraints in international politics and emphasize individual policies and dispositions as all-important. My own stress on systemic constraints derived from structural anarchy and the primacy of security and self-help is straight out of the neorealist catechism. (This is because realism, especially neorealism, is a good theory for explaining war, but not peace.) Secondly, if Trachtenberg could not find in the first nine chapters of the book (more than four hundred pages) massive evidence of how virtually every player in the great drama, including finally even the most powerful—Russia, Great Britain, and Napoleonic France—came to feel itself trapped in this system; how they did things they did not want to do and feared doing, because they saw no alternative; how they tried half-heartedly and foolishly or with great ingenuity and all-out effort, like Leopold II of Austria, to escape, or hide, or construct a new system, and failed—if Trachtenberg, to repeat, cannot see this evidence or follow this story, then I give up. Lastly, the main point about Napoleon, made with wearying repetition and in exhaustive detail, was that while Napoleon's ambition and untimely, senseless imperialism provoked the actual wars, the more basic obstacle to durable peace in Europe was that none of his opponents or allies knew how to define or construct a comprehensive policy and system to achieve peace, so that even if Napoleon had been defeated by the allies before 1814, only an unsatisfactory, unstable settlement like that of 1919 would have emerged.

Trachtenberg's understanding of how peace was achieved is almost as unsatisfactory. He sees more or less where Europe came out, but not how it got there, and misses the unique character of the settlement entirely. The change in 1813–15 did not come "almost miraculously," as he says, but out of defeat and suffering, repeated failure, and the exhaustion of alternatives, leading to a slow, painful, tortuous process of collective learning in which all the important actors ultimately changed their thinking about the requirements for a durably

pacified Europe (Chaps. 10–12). From this shift in collective mentality there emerged, with great difficulty, a consensus on a practical definition and program of peace different from previous conceptions. It placed a priority on political solutions and agreements over military victory, even in dealing with France. It took the distribution of power seriously (and so do I), but in negotiating territorial issues laid the main emphasis not on balancing power with other power for deterrence and compellence (that was a fallback position, a tactic held in reserve), but on reconciling the competing rights and claims of states so as to achieve an overall balance of satisfactions and to give each state the measure of power necessary to sustain its rank, independence, and functions within a harmonious European family of states. It then tied all the settlements on territory and other rights and claims (to independence, security, status, thrones, confederation, neutrality, etc.) together in one great interlocking package of treaty guarantees, so that the security of each state's rights required respect for those of others. It finally backed the whole settlement with a collective great power security alliance and made provision for Concert diplomacy to avoid and manage future problems and crises.

Nothing of this concrete structure of peace appears in Trachtenberg's review. He refers only to the spirit behind it, "a sort of communitarian ethos, based on something like a rule of law." I agree—without his skeptical undertone. This did result in something like the rule of law in European international politics. It was a rule of law, however, based on consensus rather than a hegemonic lawgiver, and deriving its strength not from some vague communitarian ethos, but from the hard-won recognition that the independence and security of all states were inextricably intertwined, and that respect for others' rights could protect one's own—plus concrete measures, mainly other than balance-of-power ones, to sanction defectors and violators.

Trachtenberg gives equally short shrift to the rest of the book (Chaps. 13–17), which describes the filling out and operation of the 1815 settlement, and its results to 1848. No one reading Trachtenberg's review would guess what these were—results not perfect, but vastly superior to those of any other general settlement before or since, making 1815–1853, not 1946–1990, the real "Long Peace" in European history. The most remarkable thing about the Vienna settlement is not that it led to thirty-eight years of general peace in Europe, though that is impressive enough. It is rather a whole series of achievements of which no other general peace settlement can boast, which any serious analysis must take into account. Here are some:

It ended the whole war once and for all, stopping all the fighting in every theater of conflict.

It ended the competition in arms, led to a general and substantial armaments reduction, and averted any serious revival of the arms race for forty years.

It addressed and settled, at least in principle, all the issues before it, leaving no major dispute unresolved.

It resolved some issues which had troubled European politics for some centuries, like the Baltic question or Swiss neutrality, so durably that they never rose again.

It terminated some historic ongoing rivalries and wars so that they never re-emerged—Sweden versus Denmark, Russia versus Sweden, Austria versus Bavaria; put other great rivalries on hold for decades (Austria versus Prussia, Austria versus Sardinia); and changed others from belligerent into non-belligerent rivalries (Britain versus France).

It gave Germany, the main arena of European struggles for three hundred years, a constitution more effective for internal peace and European security than any other in its history until (arguably) 1990.

It addressed the principal sources of eighteenth-century war (dynastic succession conflicts, colonial rivalry, maritime competition, etc.) so effectively that they ceased for decades to be dangers to peace.

It drew historic enemies and rivals into wary cooperation in managing spheres and questions of mutual concern—Britain and France in Belgium, the Iberian Peninsula, and Greece; Austria and Prussia in Germany; Austria and Russia in the Near East.

It made it possible for problems and crises that had constantly caused wars in the past, and would do so again after this system was overthrown—the Eastern question, the Belgian question, civil war in the Ottoman Empire—to be managed cooperatively, so as not only to avoid war, but also to promote useful change—an independent Greece, an independent neutral Belgium, the Ottoman Empire saved from collapse and started on reform.

It preserved for four decades the independence and integrity of all the states in the system, large and small.

It turned the European powers from forging and using alliances as instruments of expansion and capability aggregation into making and using alliances as tools of management and restraint, which posed no threat to other powers and embodied specific pledges of non-aggrandizement.

It preserved international peace through two major waves of revolution long after the settlement, in 1830–32 and 1848–49, and through more than a generation of accelerating social and economic change.

Professor Trachtenberg disputes my claim that this constituted a transformation of European politics, or that the new one required the transcending of normal balance-of-power rules. He concedes that stability involves something more than power politics, some agreement on common rules and restraints, but argues that good balance-of-power statesmen have always known this. Two obvious questions arise: One, do these necessary supplements to the balance of power (moderation in goals, consensus on common rules and restraints, and willingness to obey them, etc.) emerge naturally out of balance-of-power rules and practices, encouraged and promoted by them, or are the two, if not mutually exclusive, in opposition and tension? Theorists disagree; the evidence I cite seems to me to argue powerfully for the latter view. Two, if sensible statesmen have always known what it takes for a balance-of-power system to produce

peace and stability, why has no other balance-of-power system under their aegis ever achieved the profound peace and stability of the Vienna system?

Beyond these fundamental questions, Trachtenberg's attempts to show how the balance of power made the Vienna system stable only illustrate again how he misses the point. He seizes, for example, on my assertion that a united German-led *Mitteleuropa* would have been bad for European stability either in the nineteenth or the twentieth century, criticizing it as not only unsupported, but somehow sinister. It suggests that "international stability is not the only thing Schroeder is concerned with," "that something else is going on here," that I rule out some ways of structuring the European system "for reasons having little to do with how stable they are." I am astounded at having to explain the dangers in this particular scheme to an expert on the twentieth century. Does Trachtenberg seriously consider the *Mitteleuropa* schemes of prewar and World War I Germany (to say nothing of Hitler) recipes for European stability? The reasons against this, in both centuries, seem to me too obvious to merit discussion. Leaving aside the general dangers of German domination over other East European peoples, especially Slavs, any central Europe organized under a united Great Germany, unless it expanded by imperialist conquest well beyond Central Europe, would not be strong enough to dominate Europe and impose a hegemonic stability on it, but would surely constitute a threat to its neighbors and provoke counter-coalitions.

Similarly, Trachtenberg fails to understand why I object to the British "balance-of-power" policy of manipulating the natural rivalries of continental powers, so long as British aims were peaceful and moderate. After all, he says, my own account shows that Britain's ability to use Austria as a counterweight to Russia in the 1830s was a factor in restraining Russia. Once again, Trachtenberg just does not get it. As I explain repeatedly (pp. 730–35, 762–63, and passim), there were two divergent recipes for restraining Russia in the Near East. One was Britain's (especially Palmerston's) balance-of-power policy, sometimes shared by France: to confront Russia with a blocking coalition, including Austria, to compel it to back down. The other was Austria's policy of grouping: to tie Russia to a Europe united in diplomatic concert, committing Russia to act only in conjunction with all the other interested powers. The superiority of the latter approach for purposes of peace, stability, and great power harmony seems to me obvious, but we need not rely on conjecture. The historical record is fairly decisive. The policy of grouping Russia, followed generally in the Vienna era, produced remarkable overall restraint and cooperation from Russia. The balance-of-power policy applied in the 1850s by Britain and France produced the Crimean War.

One more issue remains, the heart of the matter. Trachtenberg repeatedly terms my argument "just not convincing." No one who proposes a major revisionist thesis should expect to convince everyone. There are at least four main reasons why a reviewer might reject it: because the argument is untenable or seriously flawed; because there is a fundamental difference in basic assumptions; because the reviewer has another better, or at least alternative, interpretation; or because his ignorance, incomprehension, or ideological commitment

on the subject is invincible. I honestly do not draw myself, or wish to suggest, a conclusion as to which of these, or what alternative explanation, may apply in this case. I am entirely willing to accept that I will not convince Professor Trachtenberg and other realists, and would gladly let it go at that. I only wish to argue in reply that if my explanation for the Long Peace of 1815–1853 fails to convince them, they owe the world of historians and political scientists a better realist one. In my view, argued at length and in great detail in this book, the prevalent realist explanation of this Long Peace, which is the central theme and subject of the book being reviewed, is not merely unconvincing. It is virtually nonexistent, patently inadequate. In regard to this peace (admittedly not his field), Trachtenberg does what realists regularly have done and do—ignore the problem of explaining it, or dismiss it with superficial, sloganistic, offhand answers. They explain peace with precisely the same facile power-political explanations that they use for war. War is the result of power politics conducted foolishly or aggressively. Peace is the result of sensible balance-of-power politics pursued moderately and sensibly.

This fits into and derives from a dominant trend, or better a pervasive underlying condition, in both international history and political science. War is problematized, and its explanation, both as a general phenomenon and in individual instances, given massive importance and attention. Peace is ignored, treated as a non-event, conceived not as a difficult construction, a hard-won achievement, but as simply the absence of major violent conflict. Peace therefore does not need to be explained—unless, of course, it is the so-called Long Peace since 1945, or the democratic peace that neoliberals investigate. After all, everyone knows that throughout the Westphalian era there never was real peace and stability—only pauses between war, usually brief ones.

Yet little thought is needed to see that on logical and historical grounds alike peace represents the problem to be explained in international politics more than war. Wars can arise from myriad causes under a very wide range of circumstances, almost by accident. Peace, real peace, cannot just happen. It must be willed, planned, bought, and paid for by artifice, struggle, and the overcoming of obstacles.

One thing I feel my book demonstrates, whether one agrees with its particular arguments or not, is that the Vienna settlement represents a remarkable historic achievement which demands recognition and explanation, especially from good historians like Professor Trachtenberg. He does not agree with my explanation of it. I cheerfully accept this. But then I ask that he and other realists at least recognize a problem here, one that they must deal with—the existence of something important in international history that demands analysis and explanation. Let them come up with their own explanation of it, one which exhibits the same rigor, theoretical sophistication, logical consistency, and careful attention to the facts that they display themselves, and demand of others, in regard to explaining war. Let them not simply dismiss the problem with another of the innumerable warmed-over versions of Thucydides, Morgenthau, Kissinger, and Waltz that are regularly served up as explanations of everything important

in international politics, along with assurances that this is really solid, nourishing fare, at once counterintuitive, courageous, and humane.

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The Author Responds:

Can I begin by trying to clear the table a bit? There are real issues here that deserve attention, but before turning to them, I would like to deal with a number of secondary points that Professor Schroeder raises.

First of all, he says that I ignored a lot of what was in his book. This is certainly true. I did not talk, for example, about the "filling out and operation" of the 1815 settlement; I did not present Schroeder's views on this subject, and indeed many aspects of this 804-page book are totally neglected. I wanted to give some feel for the basic lines of Schroeder's historical argument, but I certainly did not try to give a comprehensive account of the book's contents. What I concentrated on was Schroeder's attack on balance-of-power thinking. This, it seemed to me, was fundamental—not just an essential part of the book, but quite important in terms of its political implications. It was therefore the aspect of Schroeder's argument that I thought *Orbis* readers would find of greatest interest. Is it legitimate for a review article to have such a limited scope? My own view obviously is that it is, but this is an issue which readers will have to decide for themselves; there is little point to wasting anyone's time here on that kind of question.

The real issue, of course, is not the appropriate scope of a review article. Nor is it the correct interpretation of how the peace of 1815 took shape. Schroeder says that my "understanding of how peace was achieved" is unsatisfactory. This is in fact not my field, and I would not pretend to have anything like an adequate grasp of the subject. But it was for this very reason that I limited myself simply to presenting his interpretation of the making of the 1815 settlement—and indeed to presenting it uncritically. I was a little taken aback by the way he attacked what was meant to be a simple paraphrase of his own historical argument; the reference to how a solution was reached "almost miraculously" was my way of summing up what he thought, and not my own personal interpretation. He obviously does not like the term, but I was trying to give some sense for how extraordinary, indeed (to use his own term) how "revolutionary," he thought the Vienna settlement was—for how it emerged in his view from a kind of intellectual breakthrough. In any case, I think readers can easily see that I was not trying to lay out a counter-interpretation of my own. It is hard to understand why he thinks I was, but this is really a non-issue. Our argument is not over the historical problem of the origins of the 1815 settlement. Schroeder also says I disputed his claim about European politics undergoing a major transformation. I never denied that European politics was very different after 1815 from what it had been before the French revolution,

and I would not quarrel with the idea that a major transformation had occurred. So this is another non-issue. Or to take a third example: Schroeder in his letter defends the Vienna system at some length—and I must say that I admired the pithy and very sharp way he rattled off all the successes of that system. If I had attacked the Vienna system, that extensive discussion would have had some bearing on what I had said. But I did not condemn or criticize the Vienna system; I in fact like the arrangements that were worked out in 1815. Once again, I had the sense that Schroeder was shooting his arrows at an imaginary target.

So can we turn now to the real issues? The only major difference we have, I think, has to do with his basic thesis that "balance-of-power" politics is inherently destabilizing. What exactly is our argument here really about? The whole concept of a balance-of-power system is terribly imprecise, as Schroeder himself recognizes. All sorts of ideas are associated with this general notion. When Schroeder uses the term, he thinks first and foremost of a system of virtually unbridled self-assertion. When I hear the term, I think more of equilibrium and stability. Does this mean that this is just an argument about words? The real argument derives from the fact that his indictment of balance-of-power politics is quite general. Even a British policy of trying to maintain a balance of power on the continent, with Britain herself serving as balancer, was in his view "a potential danger to peace even when Britain's policies and aims were moderate, as they were most of the time" (p. 575).

But had I simply misconstrued what he was saying here? Schroeder says, citing sections of the book that appear over 150 pages later, that what he really had in mind was that an anti-Russian "blocking" policy was destabilizing, and that the Austrian policy of tying Russia "to a Europe united in diplomatic Concert" was the way to secure the peace. There are two points to be made here. The first is that the historical interpretation in the sections he cites is simply not as he portrays it in his letter. In the first section (pp. 729–30), it is not the British but the French who champion the "blocking" policy; Metternich proposes the "grouping coalition" but Britain opts for neither. Schroeder is struck by the fact (p. 730) that Britain chooses not to cooperate with Austria in an anti-Russian policy, although later (p. 734) he says Palmerston was in favor of a "blocking coalition." British policy, especially on pages 733–34, comes across as confused and uncertain. From all this I was supposed to know what he had in mind on page 575 when he condemned Britain's balance-of-power policy in very general terms? In the second section he cites (p. 762), he condemns Palmerston's confrontational style but also argues that in Europe Britain had "two possible weapons, a liberal partnership with France and a conservative partnership with Austria," and that "Russia's fear of these weapons in Britain's hands helps explain its cautious policy in Asia and co-operative policy in Europe." But if this shows anything, it is that balance-of-power policies can be effective; I am totally at a loss to see how this passage supports the opposite conclusion about a moderate balance-of-power policy being a "potential danger to peace."

But there is a more basic point to be made here, and that is that even if Schroeder is right about Palmerston and the destabilizing nature of the "blocking strategy," the passage on p. 575 had been framed in much broader terms. And throughout the book, the impression Schroeder wants to give is that balance-of-power policies of all sorts, even of the most moderate kind, are inherently destabilizing.

The issue really is whether this general indictment holds up in the light of the historical evidence—that is, the evidence which Schroeder himself presents in support of his basic thesis about balance-of-power politics being destabilizing. Was it true, for example, that the great European powers came to feel trapped and forced into aggressive policies by the balance-of-power system? Schroeder says it was just my obtuseness that prevented me from seeing that this was the case. Readers interested in sorting this out will have to go through the evidence in the book themselves. But if they would like to see how extreme Schroeder's position is, they might want to consider the following questions. Schroeder writes in his letter that even "Napoleonic France" was "trapped in this system," but what exactly in the system was forcing Napoleon to behave aggressively? Schroeder of course *says* over and over again that everybody was trapped, but does he actually *prove* that real choices did not exist? Does he even come close to demonstrating that Napoleon in particular had little choice but to behave the way he did?

If there is one passage in the book that should be read with some care in this context, it is the concluding paragraph in the fourth chapter. Here Schroeder talks about how "all the other great powers had come to terms with this French hegemony," that it was only Bonaparte's aggressiveness, "his insistence on empire," that led to renewed warfare—"nothing more than this, nothing deeper in the structure of European international politics." All this, I should say, I found quite convincing, very much in keeping with the historical discussion in the book. But then, in practically the same breath, he goes on to claim that "the tenacious sway of the competitive politics of balance of power" was the really fundamental cause of international instability at this time. If, however, the other powers were willing to accept French hegemony, how can one say that the old competitive balance-of-power system was still in existence, let alone fundamentally responsible for international instability? And—to go back to the point he makes in his letter—if no one was really threatening France, how can one argue that "Napoleonic France" was trapped and had little choice but to pursue aggressive policies?

The question of the first partition of Poland also relates to the basic issue of whether balance-of-power policies are inherently destabilizing. Schroeder complains that I misrepresented his position on this question, that his "indictment of the first partition" was turned into "an endorsement of it." But I had said in that passage that in his view "the destruction of Polish independence was a source of instability." It was this assessment that I disputed. Of course, as he says, "from the point of view of the victims" what the powers did was "indistinguishable from naked aggression." No one would deny that. The key point is that the great powers were not engaged in "naked aggression" *against*

each other. The first partition of Poland was an exercise in *great power* cooperation. It helped the *great power* system function smoothly. And Schroeder is too good a historian not to see this; in fact, he reiterates this point in his letter. Is it a "misrepresentation" to show him calling the first partition an example of "international cooperation"? The words are his. I did not put them in his mouth. And the point itself, which was absolutely correct, struck me as relevant to the central issue. It showed that by Schroeder's own admission the system he described sometimes enabled the great powers to work out their differences. The "system" did not in itself simply drive the great powers into conflict with each other; this example showed how it could have a quite different effect.

This is my basic difference with Schroeder. For him, it is always the "system" that is responsible. The system breeds war in the eighteenth century; the 1815 system as he describes it is the bedrock of peace in the early nineteenth century. "Peace, real peace," he says in his letter, "cannot just happen. It must be willed, planned, bought, and paid for by artifice, struggle, and the overcoming of obstacles." This is the *cri de coeur* of a system builder. This is not the way I look at history or think about international politics. To my mind the idea that the system determines state behavior is always suspect; the presumption is that a state, especially a great power, generally has a good deal of freedom to chart its own course in international affairs. The logic of historical change is rather loose; whether you get war or peace depends on the particular policies that states adopt. Policies obviously interact, and all are shaped to some extent by certain common factors characteristic of the period in question—prevailing political and social systems and the beliefs and values associated with them; basic economic, demographic and technological factors; and so on. Looking at all this as a whole, it is perfectly reasonable to refer loosely to the "system" of the day, but we should understand that that is all that we are doing. The mistake is to think of the system as somehow more fundamental than, and independent of, the behavior of the states involved.

Where does the issue of "realism" come in? For Schroeder, stability means system building. Realists view such notions with a degree of skepticism. They set their sights somewhat lower. My own view is that there are a handful of things that can be said about the kinds of policies that make for a more stable world. For example, if the goal is stability, statesmen should understand how the international system works; they should understand the central role that power plays in that system and frame their policies accordingly. A concern with the structure of power is thus legitimate and indeed essential; balance-of-power thinking in at least some sense of the term is thus a normal part of a stable international order. None of this is high theory. These are all fairly elementary points. Indeed, I am not sure whether Schroeder would disagree fundamentally with an argument framed in those terms.

I find it puzzling, in fact, that a diplomatic historian of Schroeder's stature should take such an extreme line on these issues. But the fact is that in the book balance-of-power thinking is condemned explicitly and repeatedly and in very general terms. Those arguments are important, and one has to examine with some care whether Schroeder succeeds in making his case. My

conclusion was that there was a considerable gap between what he claimed in this area and what his evidence showed. But the mere fact that I say this does not mean that it is so. Readers who would like to see who is right will have to go through the text and decide the issue for themselves.

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