

Patrick O. Cohrs, *The Unfinished Peace after World War I: America, Britain and the Stabilisation of Europe, 1919–1932*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2006; xiv + 693 pp., 1 map; 9780521853538, £65.00 (hbk)

There has been a very welcome reorientation recently in studies of the international relations of the interwar period, moving away from a focus upon the inevitability of the collapse of the Versailles settlement and towards a more constructive view of its actual achievements. What is so noteworthy, the story now goes, is what was built under the unsettled conditions of the time, not what failed. The most prominent example is Zara Steiner's magisterial, and perhaps unmatched, study, *The Lights that Failed: European International History, 1919–1933* (2005), which puts the case in its broadest and most convincing terms. In his study of British and American diplomacy during the 1920s, Patrick Cohrs argues a similar line for a more narrowly focused case. Based upon wide research in British, American, German and French archives, Cohrs makes a provocative argument for a re-evaluation of the possibilities of creating what he calls a 'real peace' in post-1918 Europe.

While the book broadly covers the years 1919 to 1932, Cohrs's thesis is at heart about the meaning of the period 1923–29, covered in three substantive sections on 'the Anglo-American stabilisation of Europe', leading up to the 1924 London conference on reparations; 'Europe's nascent *Pax Anglo-Americana*' (1924–25), culminating in the 1925 Locarno treaty on Western European security; and 'the unfinished transatlantic peace order' (1926–29), which saw the incomplete implementation of the 'London and Locarno' system. He puts forward two central propositions: first, it was the settlements achieved at London and Locarno which, by late 1925, had created a genuine window of opportunity for the formation of a lasting stabilization of Europe through integrating Germany politically and economically into a new international system; second, this window closed because policymakers in Britain and the United States did not maintain the necessary commitment to this settlement in order to both legitimize and consolidate it. What this meant in practice was that the crucial issue unsettling European international relations, the Franco-German dispute, remained unresolved.

Cohrs spells out his intentions with great care in his Introduction; the remainder of the book is a highly detailed working out of his thesis. It is not always an easy read: the prose is stiff, formal, and – in places – decidedly clunky, yet it has the related virtues of exactness and clarity of meaning. What is new is the emphasis placed upon the American role in Europe during the 1920s, often a marginal element in studies of the period. The detail adduced here demonstrates persuasively that a rounded understanding of European international relations after the First World War requires the integration of the United States. Cohrs thus paints a much fuller picture of the details of Washington's policy towards Europe under Charles Evans Hughes, Frank Kellogg and Herbert Hoover.

However, there is a tendency to overstate the importance of American influence at the expense of other, well-established factors. By making Anglo-American relations central to European diplomacy, Cohrs seriously underestimates the strength and importance of the Anglo-French connection. While British and American motivations are interrogated in detail, those of French policymakers are taken too much at face value. Nor is it clear that British leaders were as willing to acknowledge and wait on American leadership as Cohrs suggests. Although not all its arguments are persuasive, this book is nonetheless an important contribution to the international history of the interwar period. The critical issue grappled with by European statesmen in the 1920s was the creation of new and lasting systems of security. Cohrs's challenging thesis requires readers to reconsider how they went about this, yet his argument for the existence of a new 'Euro-Atlantic' order which had the potential to maintain the peace remains debatable. The aversion to new commitments in both London and Washington was always going to leave it critically short of permanency.

ANDREW WEBSTER, *Murdoch University*