Austria and US Security

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Embattled, contested, you lie at the heart of Europe. . . ." So runs the second verse of the Austrian national anthem. Throughout history the territory occupied by present-day Austria has been crucial to the balance of power in Europe. Today the importance of Austria as a factor in Europe's military constellation has scarcely diminished. Yet, until 1945 Austria played virtually no role in American security policy. The end of World War II, however, saw the division of Europe into ideologically antagonistic camps requiring a significant American military presence on the Continent. Only then did Washington find it necessary to reexamine its hitherto languorous relationship with Austria.

In the immediate postwar period relations between Vienna and Washington were determined largely by the emerging East-West conflict and the occupation of Austria by the four wartime Allies. Faced with Soviet efforts to extend its influence into Western Europe, American planners quickly recognized Austria's importance as a bulwark against further encroachments by Moscow. In 1947 the Joint Chiefs of Staff succinctly articulated America's security interests in Austria:

> We cannot afford to let this key area fall under the exclusive influence of the Soviet Union, for if this should happen, it would not only consolidate Soviet domination of the Danubian and Balkan areas but would also weaken our position in Italy, Germany, and Czechoslovakia.[1]

To this end the United States pursued the objective of reestablishing Austria as an independent, Western-oriented democracy. Accordingly, American support for rebuilding war-ravaged Austria was considerable. Washington's economic assistance programs, including the Marshall Plan, amounted to some $1.169 billion. Military aid, which was instrumental in building the new Austrian armed forces (*Bundesheer*), totaled $96 million by the early 1960s.[2]

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The central role played by Austria during the height of the Cold War is often forgotten in the United States today. And in view of the globalization of US interests, one easily loses sight of the fact that Austria continues to be a strategic country of vital importance for the maintenance of the balance of power in Europe. Indeed, the recent ratification of the INF Treaty, which surely presages an increased reliance on conventional forces, merely underscores the importance of Austria and its armed neutrality for American interests in the region.

The Geostrategic Importance of Austria

Without question, Austria's military importance derives from its geographical position in Europe. Relatively poor in natural resources and small in terms of area and population, Austria nevertheless occupies a region that has been a strategic borderland and crossroads for centuries. The area which is present-day Austria was one of the northern frontier outposts of the old Roman Empire and later the eastern frontier of the Holy Roman Empire. Austria also lies astride an oft-used invasion route. The Nibelungs are said to have marched through from west to east, as did Napoleon. For centuries the Turks and the Hungarians tried to do the reverse. In World War II Germany used Austria as a springboard into the Balkans; and in 1945 the Soviets pushed into Austria as a main axis of advance into Nazi Germany—a point we'll want to keep in mind.

The withdrawal of the Western allies from occupation zones in western Austria in 1955 adversely affected NATO's strategic position in Central Europe by disrupting the alliance's continuous defensive line from the North Sea to the Adriatic. As a consequence NATO was split into northern and southern tiers, with the flanks of each anchored on Austria. The split also lengthened NATO's line of defense, which now runs along the northern and southern borders of Austria instead of through it.[3] In view of these drawbacks, the JCS consistently regarded an Allied withdrawal from their occupation zones with concern, even preferring a continuation of the occupation, lest Austria become little more than a military vacuum threatening NATO's central front.[4] In the early 1950s this fear was so strong that some US officials urged incorporation of Austria into NATO until it became clear that the Austrians themselves opposed this step, which would have meant the permanent

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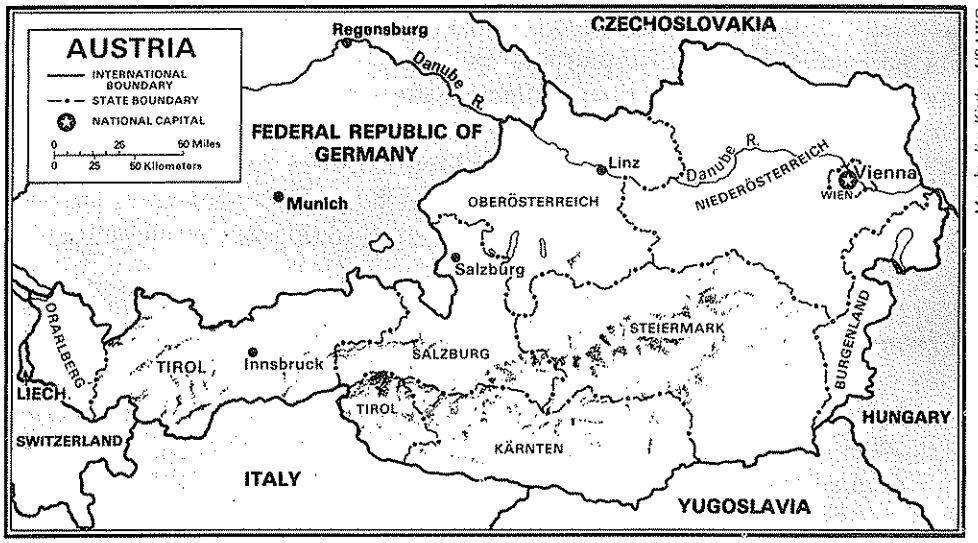

Map by Jim Kistler, USAWC

division of their country.[5] During the ratification hearings for the Austrian State Treaty, the US Senate, too, demanded assurances from the Eisenhower Administration that the United States would continue to arm the new Austrian army to minimize any weakness to the West's strategic position in Central Europe after the withdrawal of the occupation forces.[6] Throughout the treaty negotiations the Defense Department insisted, successfully, that an Austrian army be in place before the final withdrawal of the occupation forces. It was to this end that a substantial US military assistance program was inaugurated in Austria, continuing into the early 1960s.

For the Soviets the surrender of an occupation zone in eastern Austria was but a minor price for the withdrawal of the three Western powers. Apart from splitting the NATO front, the Allied withdrawal and Vienna's neutrality ruled out, in perpetuity, any Austrian participation in the Western alliance system, a result which Moscow adamantly insisted upon throughout the State Treaty negotiations. For if Austria did not represent a wedge splitting the Warsaw Pact as it did NATO, Austria's geography nevertheless created a potentially dangerous salient into the East Bloc, a threat largely eliminated by Austria's neutrality. In the final analysis, the withdrawal of Soviet troops to bases in neighboring Czechoslovakia and Hungary did not seriously impair the Red Army's strategic position in Central Europe so long as Austria remained neutral.

Today the major axes of advance into NATO's central front are generally recognized to be the north German plain, the Fulda Gap, and the Hof Corridor, and it is in those sectors that NATO has concentrated its combat power in Central Europe.[7] Little consideration is given to Austria as an approach into Germany. Yet a casual glance at a relief map shows that a major axis of advance runs East-West through northern Austria into southern

Germany: along the Danube River Valley from Vienna to Regensburg. Feeding across the Austrian frontier and into the Danube Valley from Czechoslovakia and Hungary are three suitable entry conduits. The Danube Valley presents favorable terrain for high-speed armored and mechanized forces and represents a serious threat to NATO's Central Army Group (CENTAG) in central and southern Germany.[8] In the event the balloon goes up in Europe, no one seriously believes that the Soviet Union would scruple over violating Austrian neutrality if such served its military purposes.

To counter a Warsaw Pact threat through Austria, NATO has deployed—aside from any reserves that might be allocated for this purpose—only one corps along the German-Czech border and astride the Danube Valley. Indeed, this corps not only has the largest sector in the German theater, it must also face east against overwhelmingly superior Warsaw Pact forces in Czechoslovakia and yet be prepared to meet a potential East Bloc thrust through the Danube Valley.[9]

Despite the vulnerability that the Danube River valley represents for CENTAG, most analysts continue to focus on the avenues of approach lying to the north. And yet, even a secondary penetration into CENTAG's southern flank would be a catastrophe for NATO. A penetration would present NATO commanders with at least three possibly insoluble problems: it would threaten a Cannae-like envelopment of the whole front along the inter-German border; it would wreak havoc with lines of communication between the frontline corps and their logistic bases to the west; and it would result in the loss of a large section of West Germany (to say nothing of Austria), with incalculable consequences for NATO's political will to continue prosecution of the war.

Austria also sits astride air corridors that are of vital importance to NATO. In peacetime the north-south corridor over the narrowest stretch of Tyrol in western Austria is a crucial line of communication between CENTAG and Allied Forces South (AFSOUTH) in the Mediterranean theater. Moreover, the air corridors through Austria from the east lead into the southern flank of CENTAG and the northern flank of AFSOUTH. These avenues are particularly dangerous since they skirt the main effort of NATO's air defense system.[10]

In view of these circumstances, the *Bundesheer*'s ability to deter or slow a Warsaw Pact advance through the Danube Valley is vital for the security of CENTAG's southern flank and can be ignored by NATO planners only at great risk.

The Austrian Factor

As a neutral country sharing a border of 945 kilometers with the Warsaw Pact and another 1214 kilometers with NATO. Austria is militarily exposed. While the potential for armed conflict with other states in the region receives consideration in defense planning, the Austrian General Staff

perceives the dominant threat in terms of hostilities between East and West. In view of this threat perception, the General Staff does not consider occupation of Austrian territory to be a primary objective for potential aggressors. Rather, it regards Austria in terms of its value as an avenue of approach to objectives in a theater of operations elsewhere (e.g. Germany). The General Staff, however, sees little prospect for a successful defense along Austria's borders; it has therefore adopted a strategy of "dissuasion" (*Abhaltestrategie*). The goal of this strategy is simply to dissuade a potential aggressor by threatening to inflict an unacceptably high price in terms of men, materiel, time, and loss of surprise. To implement this strategy, the General Staff envisions an unconventional war of small-unit actions in key zones to impede or disrupt an enemy advance. To this end Austria relies on a small, active-duty army of approximately 50,000 professional and conscript soldiers; however, the brunt of the defense effort would fall to the militia, which is expected to number some 300,000 troops by the mid-1990s. The militia soldier, organized and equipped to fight as light infantry, is trained to execute a number of missions on key terrain close to his home.[11]

Austria's ability to mount a credible defense is severely circumscribed by a number of restrictions imposed by the Austrian State Treaty. These restrictions must consequently concern NATO planners to the extent that the *Bundesheer*, and hence the flanks on which NATO's CENTAG and AFSOUTH rest, are weakened.

On 15 May 1955 the United States, the Soviet Union, France, the United Kingdom, and Austria concluded the Austrian State Treaty, ending the ten-year occupation, and on 26 October Vienna declared its permanent neutrality. While the treaty restored full sovereignty to Austria, it also included restrictions which would later impede modernization of the *Bundesheer*. Specifically, Article 13 of the treaty prohibits a number of weapon systems. Most of the prohibitions, to be sure, are irrelevant to Austrian defense needs—e.g. submarines and sea mines—but Article 13 also contains significant limitations prohibiting Austria from possessing, constructing, or experimenting with "any self-propelled or guided missile or torpedoes or apparatus connected with their discharge or control . . . [and] guns with a range of more than 30 kilometers."[12]

The intent of these limitations—as with similar (almost word for word) restrictions in the 1947 peace treaties with Italy, Hungary, Finland, Bulgaria, and Rumania—was to prevent the acquisition of long-range, offensive missiles by the countries that had fought on the side of Hitler's Germany. Ironically, the restrictions imposed on Austria were first mentioned in a 1946 American draft treaty for Austria as an effort at a general reduction in the level of armaments after the war and were later included in the State Treaty as an outgrowth of the 1947 treaties. Great Britain was particularly insistent on the inclusion of those restrictions as a consequence of that

country's experience with German V1 and V2 rocket attacks during World War II. The potential for the employment of missiles as a future delivery system for the embryonic atomic bomb also lent urgency to the inclusion of those restrictions in the postwar treaties.[13]

In the intervening 41 years, however, technological advances have made possible a class of precision-guided missiles which were scarcely imaginable in 1947. Indeed, today those missiles represent the most effective defense against modern, high-performance aircraft and armored vehicles. In view of these developments, the states that were party to the 1947 peace treaties have long since acquired the defensive missiles still prohibited to Austria.

The new *Bundesheer* quickly recognized the dilemma posed by the obligation to defend neutrality on the one hand and by the limitations imposed by Article 13 on the other. In 1959, therefore, the *Bundesheer* purchased a battalion of Czechoslovakian RM-130 multiple rocket launchers, and a year later it tested the Swiss wire-guided antitank missile Mosquito. Since that time, the *Bundesheer* has acquired Bofors 7.5cm M57 air-to-air rockets, the American M72 66mm light antitank weapon (LAW), and the 7.4cm PAR 70 antitank rocket (Miniman).[14] Of significance is the fact that the appearance of these weapons in Austria has not been concealed and has evoked no known protest from any of the signatories to the State Treaty. The absence of any formal protest suggests that if the weapons acquired by the *Bundesheer* were indeed questionable from the standpoint of the literal meaning of Article 13, the signatories nevertheless have found them acceptable from the standpoint of the *intent* of the treaty restrictions.

Although the parties to the 1947 peace treaties have long since acquired missiles and although the *Bundesheer* itself has acquired short-range rockets, the Austrian government has refused over the years to permit the purchase of more modern defensive missiles. The reluctance to address the *Bundesheer*'s legitimate requirements for defensive missiles was particularly evident as the 1960s drew to a close and the Socialist Party, led by Bruno Kreisky (Chancellor, 1970-1983), came to power. Under Kreisky, Austria placed greater emphasis on foreign than on defense policy as a means of maintaining its neutrality, and during his long tenure as Chancellor, Kreisky brooked no discussion of missiles, let alone of a reinterpretation of the State Treaty. The Chancellor went so far as to rebuke one of his defense ministers publicly, later replacing him, for indiscreetly urging the purchase of missiles.[15] And if some officials felt compelled to oppose the acquisition of missiles solely because of the State Treaty restrictions, there were nonetheless elements within the Socialist Party and the government who willingly accepted Article 13 as a tactically expedient argument to forestall the additional defense spending that the purchase of missiles would have entailed.[16]

Missile critics in Austria have argued that Moscow opposes missiles for the *Bundesheer*. Soviet opposition to defensive missiles per se

would, however, appear to be unlikely since Moscow's interests in the region are also served by a militarily strong, albeit neutral Austria. Any demonstrated Soviet recalcitrance seems to be rooted more in the fear of linking Austria's acquisition of missiles to a formal reinterpretation of Article 13 under the provisions of Article 34. A formal reinterpretation would represent an undesirable precedent, leading perhaps to changes in other articles of the treaty that the Soviets may regard as far more crucial to their security interests. Here I refer to those articles (i.e. 3-5, 9, 10, 14-16) which were designed to permanently separate Austria from Germany. The nonaligned Yugoslavs, too, have objected in the past to a reinterpretation of the State Treaty.[17] On the surface these objections are surprising since Belgrade's interests can only benefit from a credible Austrian defense. It was, after all, the so-called "Polarka Plan" which revealed a Warsaw Pact scenario calling for an East Bloc thrust through Austria into Yugoslavia in the event of unrest after Tito's death.[18] Belgrade's hesitation to countenance a formal reinterpretation can be understood in terms of the precedent it might set. For the Yugoslavs, Articles 6 and 7 of the State Treaty represent assurances that the rights of the Slovenian and Croation minorities in Austria will be protected, and any reinterpretation of Article 13 could eventually lead to an erosion of those rights.

Since 1983 Austrian journalists, defense analysts, government officials, and politicians of the major parties have increasingly called for a reevaluation of Austria's stance toward the missile issue.[19] Austrian military leaders, past and present, continue to point out that the lack of missiles, particularly air defense missiles, represents a serious deficiency in *Bundesheer* capabilities, and the decision in 1985 to purchase high-performance fighters (raising the question of suitable armament for the aircraft) merely underscores this deficiency.[20] Indeed, every defense minister since 1983 has openly advocated the acquisition of missiles as a long-overdue step in the overall modernization of the *Bundesheer*.[21] In 1985, in a precedent-setting step, the defense spokesmen for the three major parties (Socialists included) agreed that the *Bundesheer* required defensive missiles.[22] Clearly the Austrians today are far more willing to entertain the missile issue, and it is evident that a cautious consensus is forming that Austria cannot expect to maintain a credible armed neutrality without recourse to modern defensive missiles.

The American Interest

As long as Europe remains divided into two military blocs, it is vital for the United States and NATO that the *Bundesheer* be capable of impeding or deterring a Warsaw Pact attack through Austria. But it is difficult to see how the *Bundesheer* could possibly accomplish that without modern defensive missiles.

If the level of debate in the Austrian media is any indicator of Vienna's interest in finally breaking through the restrictions imposed on it over 30 years ago, the government there will no doubt begin to test the water for a significant purchase of missiles. One should bear in mind that the *Bundesheer* does not require a category of weapons that can in any way be considered offensive according to the intent of Article 13. The *Bundesheer* has a pressing need for antiaircraft (e.g. Stinger), antitank (e.g. TOW), and air-to-air (e.g. Sidewinder) missiles. This category of weapons exists in the inventories of virtually every respectable army in the world and should not be denied to the Austrians on the basis of Article 13. Fortunately, there appears to be little standing in the way as far as the true intent of the State Treaty is concerned.

The United States, therefore, should quietly support, indeed continue to encourage as it has in the past, Austrian efforts to modernize the *Bundesheer* and to acquire those defensive missiles compatible with the intent of the treaty.[23] Recourse to Article 34, requiring a formal reinterpretation, should be avoided; a reinterpretation of Article 13 is unnecessary and it would prove to be a messy revisitation of the long, drawn-out State Treaty negotiations of the Cold War years. We must also be willing to accept those steps that Vienna considers to be politically necessary in order to overtly introduce modern guided missiles into the *Bundesheer*. That may well mean the purchase of missiles from a country other than the United States in order to deflect criticism from the East Bloc of overreliance on US-produced weapons. While US defense contractors might bridle at this step, Washington should support it. We must not lose sight of the fact that the bottom line remains a more effective Austrian defense, not the source of the *Bundesheer*'s weapons.

At the end of the Second World War the United States quickly recognized Austria's crucial position in the postwar military balance in Central Europe. Those circumstances have changed little in the intervening 43 years. We, along with the other signatories to the Austrian State Treaty, also assumed a moral obligation to permit the Austrians to arm themselves adequately in order to defend their neutrality, which we and the other signatories formally recognized ten years after the war. And if the NATO nations are to place a greater reliance on their conventional capabilities, as indeed it appears they must, the Austrian *Bundesheer* will become an even more important factor in maintaining Austria's neutrality and regional stability in the years to come. We may not in good conscience deny the Austrians the legitimate means to fulfill their responsibilities, which, after all, coincide with our own interests in Central Europe.

NOTES

1. "The Joint Chiefs of Staff to the US High Commissioner for Austria (25 May 1947)," in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1947* (Washington: GPO, 1972), II, 1177. (Hereinafter *FRUS*, followed by the year.)

2. "Abkommen zwischen Österreich und den Vereinigten Staaten von Amerika vom 29. März 1961," *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Aussenpolitik* (No. 4, 1961), p. 261; and US Defense Security Assistance Agency, *Foreign Military Sales, Foreign Military Construction and Military Assistance Facts* (Washington: Comptroller, DSAA, 1985), p. 53.

3. For an old but still valid analysis of the effects of the State Treaty and the subsequent neutrality declaration by Austria on the strategic balance in Central Europe, see "Die militärische Lage Europas nach der Neutralisierung Österreichs," *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (Zurich), 23 August 1955, p. 2.

4. "Acting Secretary of State to the US Delegation at CFM (16 June 1949)," *FRUS, 1949* (Washington: GPO, 1974), III, 1243-44.

5. "Report Prepared by the Policy Planning Staff Concerning Western Union and Related Problems (23 March 1948)," pp. 61-64; and "NSC 9: The Position of the United States with Respect to Support for Western Union and Other Related Free Countries (13 April 1948)," in *FRUS, 1948* (Washington: GPO, 1973), III, 85-88; Bruno Kreisky, "So ruhige 30 Jahre hatten wir lange nicht," *Der Spiegel*, 17 February 1985, p. 125.

6. US Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, *The State Treaty for the Reestablishment of an Independent and Democratic Austria*, 84th Cong., 1st Sess., 1955, pp. 5-14.

7. See, for example, David Petraeus, "Light Infantry in Europe: Strategic Flexibility and Conventional Deterrence," *Military Review*, 64 (December 1984), 43.

8. Friedrich Wiener, *Die Armeen der neutralen und blockfreien Staaten Europas*, 4th ed. (Vienna: Verlag Überreuter, 1986), pp. 26, 30.

9. Petraeus, p. 43; "Stationierungskräfte und nationale Truppen im Abschnitt Europa Mitte," *Österreichische Militärische Zeitschrift* (hereinafter *OMZ*) (No. 1, 1985), pp. 61-62.

10. The north-south Tyrolean corridor can be used in peacetime to the extent that the overflights are not incompatible with Austria's neutrality and sovereignty. In wartime this corridor, as well as the others, would be problematical for NATO (and for Switzerland) if Austria is unable to protect its airspace and deny it to the belligerents. See *Die Presse* (Vienna), 18 March 1987.

11. Wiener, pp. 25-50; *Landesverteidigungsplan* (Vienna: Bundeskanzleramt, 1985), p. 53; Charles L. Parnell, "Security Assistance and the Neutral States of Western Europe," *The DISAM Journal*, 8 (Spring 1986), 79.

12. US Congress, Senate, *Message from the President of the United States transmitting the State Treaty for the Reestablishment of an Independent and Democratic Austria*, 84th Cong., 1st Sess., 1955, p. 12.

13. See for example Heinz Vetschera, "Die Rüstungsbeschränkungen des Österreichischen Staatsvertrages aus rechtlicher und politischer Sicht," *OMZ* (No. 5, 1979), pp. 500-05; Rudolf Hecht, "Militärische Bestimmungen in den Friedensverträgen von 1947," *OMZ* (No. 5, 1979), pp. 381-82; Manfried Rauchensteiner, "Staatsvertrag und bewaffnete Macht," *OMZ* (No. 3, 1980), p. 187.

14. Hubertus Czernin, "Österreichs Raketen," *Profil* (Vienna), 23 September 1985, pp. 34-36; Heinz Magenheimer, "Das österreichische Bundesheer 1955-1975," *OMZ* (No. 3, 1975), p. 193.

15. *Die Presse*, 7 January 1977; *Wiener Zeitung* (Vienna), 12 and 13 January 1977.

16. Friedrich W. Korkisch, "Sicherheit, Verteidigung, Neutralität: das Beispiel Österreichs," in *Strategie für den Frieden: Beiträge zur Sicherheitspolitik*, ed. Gerhard Hubatschek (Herford: Verlag Busse & Seewald GmbH, 1986), p. 281. See also *Wiener Zeitung*, 24 June 1984; *Die Presse*, 3 August 1984, 4 July 1985, and 21-22 February 1987; *Kurier* (Vienna), 11 October 1984.

17. *Die Presse*, 8-9 January 1977.

18. "Moskaus Aufmarschpläne gegen Österreich," *Profil*, 14 February 1974, pp. 39-43. This article was part one of a three-part series on the Warsaw Pact plan "Polarka." The remaining installments appeared on 21 and 28 February 1974.

19. See for example: *Die Presse*, 17 September 1984, 7 June and 3 July 1985, and 21-22 February 1987; *Wiener Zeitung*, 16 June and 19 July 1985, and 20 June 1987; *Kurier*, 3 July 1985 and 23 July 1986; and "Raketen-Riegen," *Profil*, 29 July 1985, p. 9.

20. See *Die Presse*, 14 February 1986 and 21-22 February 1987; *Wiener Zeitung*, 7 September 1986 and 21 July 1987; *Kurier*, 12 August 1986, and 12 January and 23 February 1987.

21. *Neue Kronen Zeitung* (Vienna), 9 September 1984; *Wiener Zeitung*, 12 September 1984; *Kurier*, 23 July 1986; and *Die Presse*, 19 February 1987.

22. *Wiener Zeitung*, 24 August 1985.

23. *Die Presse*, 27 August 1982 and 23-24 June 1984. Former US Ambassador to Austria Ronald Lauder was particularly vocal in urging Vienna to modernize the *Bundesheer* with antiair and antitank missiles. See *Die Presse*, 16 April 1986, and *Profil*, 28 July 1986, pp. 40-41.