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## THE CREDIBLE DEFENSE MANQUÉ OF COLD WAR AUSTRIA

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Manfried Rauchensteiner (ed.), *Zwischen den Blöcken: NATO, Warschauer Pakt und Österreich* (Vienna: Böhlau 2010), 817 pages, ISBN: 978-3-205-78469-2, EURO 69,00.

The field of Austrian contemporary history writing is not blessed with an overabundance of studies on Austria's role and fate during the Cold War era (1945-1990).<sup>1</sup> Austria's military position between the power and the impact of the iron curtain on border communities has long been ignored.<sup>2</sup> This collection of essays in the massive volume edited by Manfred Rauchensteiner is a book long overdue. Ever since he penned his classic study *Der Sonderfall* (1979), Rauchensteiner, of course, has been one of the doyens of Austrian Cold War scholarship and this volume will only solidify his position. A dozen scholarly articles usually do not amount to an almost 800-page book. The editor has obviously encouraged the contributors to range broadly and dig deeply in their analyses. The result is a series of in-depth studies of Austria's national security policies, military position and maneuvering between the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the Warsaw Pact (WP) during most of the Cold War. Some of the contributions are more than regular scholarly articles and amount to first drafts of monographic studies. This collection is easily the best volume we have on military aspects of the Cold War in Austria; it will set the parameters of the debate for a long time to come. As with all collections of essays the contributions are uneven. The scholars fully engage the discourses of Cold War historiography, while the practitioners who worked in leadership positions in the Austrian postwar military and diplomatic establishment ignore the pertinent scholarly discourses. Peter Jankowitsch's chapter on

foreign policy is not grounded in historiography and stands out as the only weak contribution.

Summarizing such a rich volume of mostly well-informed contributions can only be done by outlining some of the larger themes addressed and then offer some overall conclusions. Bruno Thoss's and Wolfgang Mueller's rock-solid contributions on the formation of both NATO and the WP and Austria's role in the military planning of the opposing Cold War alliance systems provide the parameters in which Austrian national security policy had to operate for the duration of the Cold War. During the four-power occupation of Austria, the country maneuvered itself into the position of an "indirect ally" (60) of the U.S. and NATO, argues Thoss, one of Germany's top scholars on NATO history. In the 1950s Austria played the role of a "glacis" (Vorfeld) for NATO's defense efforts in Northern Italy. Washington considered Western troop withdrawals from Austria in 1955 "catastrophic" (69). After the signing of the Austrian State Treaty in 1955 the Western powers put immense pressure on the Austrian Government to build up credible defense forces for the protection of its new neutral status (also since the signatory powers of the treaty did not offer a territorial security guarantee as had been envisioned in the bilateral Austro-Soviet Moscow Memorandum of April 15, 1955 [on this, see the Michael Gehler essay in this volume, 89ff.]). A "military vacuum" in Austria had been a specter in the Pentagon ever since 1947 (70f.). When in 1955 the Italian defense minister suggested defending the Alpine passes with atomic devices (78), the ultimate question looming over the protection of neutral Austria during the Cold War centered around whether NATO ultimately would defend it with nuclear weapons. From the very beginning of its new-born independence in 1955, American military planners never had any illusions about Austria's military capability – the maintenance of domestic security was the primary task while Austria's limited role in delaying invading Soviet forces in their advances West was only secondary. Throughout the Cold War it was unclear whether Austria would be "Durchmarschland" or "Aufmarschland" – a venue for NATO troops to pass

through along the Danube and the Alpine passes, or an operational base for the positioning of WP troops to attack Bavaria and Italy.

From the perspective of Soviet strategists Austria constituted from the very beginning a suitable blockade (“Sperrriegel”) between the NATO fronts in West Germany and Italy, notes Wolfgang Mueller. At the same time the creation of a neutral Austria in 1955 spelled the loss of the Danube Valley through which a WP attack from Southern Bohemia and/or Hungary might advance. During a visit to Austria in 1959, Soviet defense minister Marshal Malinovsky remarked with studied ambiguity that the Soviet Union “will never be *first* in violating Austrian neutrality” (153). Beginning in the early 1960s, the WP strategy included the Danube Valley in their plans for a (counter) offensive against NATO forces. With the rise of Khrushchev Soviet military strategy increasingly relied on the nuclear threat and thought a nuclear war “winnable” (157). Soviet strategy became offensive and included the “preventive nuclear blow” (158f.) against NATO territory. WP scenarios envisioned countering NATO surprise attacks with massive preventive strikes of “hundreds of nuclear bombs blasting away” (Vojtech Mastny). Hungarian strategic plans in the mid-1960s envisioned destroying Vienna with two 500-kiloton atomic weapons (164-167).

Colonel Friedrich Korkisch’s well-informed essay on “the nuclear component” in NATO and WP thinking parallels many of Mueller’s and Thoss’s conclusions. Escalation to nuclear war was an integral part of strategic planning in both bloc systems. It goes without saying that neutral Austria would not have been spared. WP planning envisioned a “super Cannae” (403f.) by enveloping NATO forces east of the Rhine in Germany. Korkisch does make the major distinction that Soviet options in the use of nuclear weapons also included dropping them on Austrian military targets while NATO planning envisioned the use of nuclear weapons in Austria *after* the expected collapse of the Austrian Army (389).

How did the Austrian political establishment deal with such threat scenarios during the Cold War? With much “wishful thinking” (the “Prinzip Hoffnung”), says Rauchensteiner in a deadpan fashion (266); by “sticking their heads in the sand”, says General Hannes Philipp (376). Rauchensteiner’s and Philipp’s thorough chapters are serious indictments of the entire postwar political leadership (they are reminiscent of today’s political debate between the civilian secretary

of defense and the military establishment in Austria about ending the general draft). With a negligible defense budget hovering around 1 percent of GNP (339), the political elite in both parties (the Socialists more so than the conservative People’s Party) never gave the Austrian military the means to even come close to providing a credible defense for the country. The Austrian military did make credible efforts to defend at least the core of the Alpine region against an enemy that throughout the Cold War was expected to come from the East (255). This was the Alpine “redoubt” with the important mountain passes that up to the signing of the State Treaty the Western occupation powers had planned to defend between the northern and southern flanks of NATO. However, the politicians never funded these military plans. While the generals strategized the politicians dithered. In the mid-1970s, General Emil Spannocchi developed an ambitious plan for Austria’s territorial defense, aiming to slow down WP offensive thrusts through the Danube Valley. But the Socialist Kreisky Government did not even provide sufficient funding even to stockpile munitions for three days to slow down the Soviet military juggernaut (372). As a young and poorly-trained recruit in the Austrian Army in 1973/74 I would have provided the cannon fodder for such criminal neglect of Austria’s defense forces by the political elite! Already during the discussions for a territorial guarantee, Austria’s defense efforts were ridiculed by the occupation powers – it made little sense to provide a guarantee for a country “that could be overrun by battalion-strength troops” (Gehler, 126).

If these essays allow one overall conclusion it is the dismal state of civil-military relations in Austria during the entire Cold War era. That mistrust between the two sides never allowed for a credible defense of Austrian territory as NATO planning expected. When push came to shove Austrian public opinion relied on the country’s neutral position and always expected the Americans and NATO to bail them out in the event of an attack from the East (Philipp, 379). Neutralist Austrian free-riding was never meant to shoulder any sacrifices to counter the awful threats the country was facing during the Cold War. The political and military elite were unprepared to educate the public about these dire scenarios. This situation prevailed into the post-Cold War era. While Moscow’s former satellites all rushed into NATO, the leaders of the Socialist Party continued to view

NATO suspiciously and prevented Austria from joining the alliance (Pleiner, 646).

General Horst Pleiner surveys the waltz of Austrian politicians in positioning the country in the new European security framework after the Cold War around a common European foreign and security policy. While Austria's formerly communist neighbors did not shy away from the higher defense expenditures that came with joining NATO, Austria looked away and continued its free-riding ("Trittbrettfahrerei"). Martin Malek shows in his fine essay on Austrian perceptions of the collapse of the WP that Austrians, led by the Socialists, cut their defense budgets even before the end of the Cold War and embarked on an "Army light"; when it came to cutting defense expenditures the majority of the neutralist Austrian public was always prepared to enthusiastically rush across the precipice towards what would have amounted to their own demise in the event of a war in central Europe. Austrians did not recognize their improved security position after the collapse of the WP either, but instead feared a new "security vacuum" and perceived NATO as being in crisis and weak (613).

Andreas Resch's and Berthold Molden's deeply researched and empirically very rich chapters on Austria's trade with Eastern Europe and the Austrian media's perception of the Cold War are treading uncharted territory in Austrian Cold War Studies. Both divide the Cold War into three distinct periods: the occupation decade (1945-1955), the "golden years" of economic prosperity and detente (1955-1975), and the late phase when Cold War tensions resumed (1975-1989). Resch places the decline of Austrian trade with its Eastern European neighbors from around 40 percent (prewar) to below 10 percent (postwar). He carefully places Austrian trade with the region within the restraining framework of Western restrictions, particularly in the initial and final phase of Cold War tensions. In the 1970s, Viennese banks and trading firms specialized on the East-West exchange of goods and moved into the forefront of East-West trade (525). Particularly after the "oil shock" of 1973, Austrian trade with the East became the "export valve" (529) that compensated for the loss of demand from the West. Molden neatly summarizes the entire range of Austrian media from print to radio and TV and their reporting on Cold War politics, especially during the dangerous crises on Austria's borders (1956, 1968, 1989). Austrian state television ORF reporting the events of the "Prague

Spring" in 1968 made it the premier Western station to cover these events (723ff.). As it turns out, in general Austrians were as disinterested in foreign policy as Americans (690). Only during the Hungarian and Czechoslovak crises in 1956 and 1968 and the 1974 "Polarka Affair", when WP plans for an occupation of (Eastern) Austria during an invasion of Yugoslavia were published in the Austrian press, was the public woken up from its willful obliviousness of Cold War tensions. Molden stresses that apart from the local Communist newspapers the reporting of the Austrian media during the Cold War was always uniformly pro-Western.

Austrian diplomat, Peter Jankowitsch, and for many years a close associate of Bruno Kreisky's and short-lived foreign minister, covers the entire trajectory of Austrian foreign policy during the Cold War from the perspective of whether Austria's neutrality produced equidistance between the blocs. He summarizes the vast terrain of Austrian neutrality policy, bilateral and multilateral diplomacy (particularly his own role in the United Nations, the Conference of Security and Cooperation, and with the movement of bloc-free states), and European integration policy very superficially and devoid of any references to the rich literature on Austrian postwar foreign policy, above all Michael Gehler's massive works on Austria's international standing during the Cold War.<sup>3</sup> Jankowitsch's is the particular filiopietism of some of the people who worked closely with Chancellor Kreisky and who recognized no other hand in the making of Austrian foreign policy but that of the brilliant Kreisky and his team of advisers. He concludes that Austria's ideological, political, and economic orientation during the Cold War favored the West and so it would be wrong to characterize her foreign policy as equidistant to that bloc (495). Civil society was similarly Western-oriented, a fact that Molden in his essay elucidates with much richer data than does Jankowitsch.

Austria's unilateral orientation towards the West during the Cold War is then another vein that unifies many of these essays. Austria acted as a "secret ally" of the West during the occupation decade. In spite of her neutrality, some of the military ties between the U.S. and NATO continued during the Cold War. The elites and the population always saw the enemy in the East and hoped that NATO would rescue them in times of crisis. What is often neglected, if not suppressed, by the Jankowitschs among Austrian elites

is the fact that Austria's growing trade with the West and her economic interdependence with the EEC and West Germany gravely undermined her status of neutrality – in the event of a crisis or war these ties with the West would not have allowed the country to stay above the fray. Austria entered a regime of secret liaison with American Marshall Planners and the CIA which made certain that Austrian exports to the Eastern bloc were closely monitored under the COCOM regime. During the Communist World Youth Festival in Vienna in 1959, Kreisky worked with the CIA to bombard the visitors with massive Western propaganda; the Austrian press put up a wall of silence and did not report the Festival at all. All of this proves that the history of Austrian “neutrality” in the Cold War still needs to be written as its practice rarely followed the Swiss model.

Does this volume leave any work to be done for Austrian Cold War scholarship? Plenty! The vast area on the work of intelligence services – both foreign and domestic – operating in Austria during the Cold War remains a black hole.<sup>4</sup> Salzburg and Vienna were “Spielwiesen der Geheimdienste” during the occupation decade – did Vienna remain so during the rest of the Cold War? Recent revelations on the late mayor of Vienna Helmut Zilk would suggest so. The revelations and deceptions in the “Polarka affair”, originating in 1968 by a Czech defector to the U.S. and made public in Austria only in 1974 by *Profil* magazine, are mentioned a number of times in these essays. When was Austrian military intelligence informed? What did the Austrian Government know about these WP plans and when? These affairs still

raise many more issues than this volume can answer. All three high-ranking officers contributing to this volume (Korkisch, Pleiner, and Philipp) argue that Austrian military intelligence was well informed during the Cold War. I would like to see independent scholars coming to the same conclusion based on access to the archival files. And what was the level of *their* collaboration with the CIA and other Western intelligence services? The history of Austrian intelligence and the intelligence wars in and over Austria still needs to be written.

There are other areas not covered at all or not well enough in this volume: Austrian relations with the decolonized Third World, including Austrian development aid and work in these areas; Austria's impressive role in United Nations peace missions since the Congo deployment of Austrian soldiers in the early 1960s<sup>5</sup>; Austria's cultural and public diplomacy during the Cold War, the “intellectual Cold Wars” that were fought in and over Austria during the East-West confrontation (like the 1959 Communist Youth Festival<sup>6</sup>); and the discourses on the reception of nuclear issues and emotions (nuclear fear!) in Austria during the Cold War. While the essays in this volume bring us a big step forward and lead us much deeper into the gargantuan strategic and operational struggles between the Eastern and Western bloc systems during the Cold War and Austria's locus in them, there is still an abundance of work to be done for future scholars on Austria in the Cold War.

*Reviewed by Günter Bischof*

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Günter Bischof, Vom Elend der österreichischen Geschichtsschreibung zum Kalten Krieg, in: Reinhard Krammer, Christoph Kühberger, Franz Schausberger (eds.), *Der forschende Blick: Beiträge zur Geschichte Österreichs im 20. Jahrhundert. Festschrift für Ernst Hanisch zum 70. Geburtstag* (Vienna 2010), 371-390.

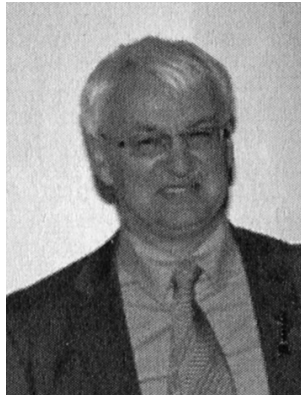
<sup>2</sup> For a fine recent study, on a border community across the Austro-Czechoslovak Cold War frontier, see Muriel Blaive, Berthold Molden, *Grenzfälle: Österreichische und tschechische Erfahrungen am Eisernen Vorhang* (Weitra 2009).

<sup>3</sup> Michael Gehler, *Österreichs Außenpolitik der Zweiten Republik*, 2 vols. (Innsbruck 2005); id., *Vom Marshall-Plan zur EU: Österreich und die Europäische Integration von 1945 bis zur Gegenwart* (Innsbruck 2006).

<sup>4</sup> Albeit a black hole slowly being explored and illuminated by Siegfried Beer and his Austrian Center for Intelligence, Propaganda and Security Studies in Graz and his *Journal for Intelligence, Propaganda and Security Studies*.

<sup>5</sup> For a shining example of such scholarship, see Erwin Schmidl, *Blaue Helme, Rotes Kreuz: Das österreichische UN-Sanitärkontingent im Kongo 1960 bis 1963* (rev. ed. Innsbruck 2011).

<sup>6</sup> See the outstanding new study on Kreisky's foreign policy by Elisabeth Roehrich, *Kreiskys Außenpolitik: Zwischen österreichischer Identität und internationalem Programm* (Göttingen 2009).



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