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## Günter Bischof and Peter Ruggenthaler, *Österreich und der kalte Krieg: Ein Balanceakt zwischen Ost und West* (Graz/Wien: Leykam, 2022)

Matthew P. Berg  
*John Carroll University*, [mberg@jcu.edu](mailto:mberg@jcu.edu)

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## **Günter Bischof and Peter Ruggenthaler, *Österreich und der kalte Krieg: Ein Balanceakt zwischen Ost und West* (Graz/Wien: Leykam, 2022)**

*Matthew Paul Berg*

Readers of this journal will need no convincing of Austria's unique trajectory over the course of the twentieth century, nor of the understated significance of the Second Republic's geopolitical position during the Cold War. Those of us who teach in English-language institutions are well aware that Austrian history (not to mention Austria's place in international politics) is *terra incognita* for most students; Günter Bischof and Peter Ruggenthaler offer this study as a contribution to flagging attention to this field in historical institutes at Austrian universities (18), but with great benefit for us, too. Both scholars are well suited to undertake a contribution such as this. Bischof brings expertise from long and fruitful engagement with both Austrian and US sources, and Ruggenthaler contributes likewise from his work with Austrian and Soviet-era documentation. Each has been at the forefront of scholarship in their respective and overlapping areas over the previous decades. Together they provide readers with a detailed and pleasingly readable monograph. Students new to the theme and experienced researchers alike will find their text, their extensive notes, and the rich bibliographies following each chapter to be valuable resources.

The book is organized chronologically, beginning with reactions to the Anschluss, the positions the Soviets and the Anglo-Americans took towards Austria in relation to the war effort against Germany, and initial planning for the postwar period. Three chapters chart postwar developments into the emergence of Cold War fissures (1945–47), the solidification of the two blocks (1947–53), and the State Treaty that ended four-power occupation and established Austria's position as a fully independent state (1953–55). The authors include two thematic chapters in the first half of the book that expand upon their principal focus. One is an investigation into “soft power” as a form of cultural warfare. Here they discuss Amerika-Haus cultural institutions as access points to the “American way of life” which, together with the promise of economic stimulus provided by the Marshall Plan, suggested a future of comfort and plenty. British and French cultural politics manifested themselves principally in literature and fine arts programs (influence as a substitute for geopolitical hegemony). The Soviets sought to counter a long-standing negative image of Communism with its own brand of cultural politics, but rather less successfully than the other three occupiers; Austrian perceptions, broadly

speaking, had been reinforced by Nazi propaganda and the behavior of some Soviet soldiers. The second thematic chapter offers a fascinating synopsis of the role that the four powers' espionage agencies in Austria—particularly in Vienna, where joint occupation offered secret services fertile ground for observation, recruitment, and subterfuge.

The book's second half advances the admixture of chronological and thematic approaches, highlighting Austrian neutrality during the crises in Hungary (1956), Czechoslovakia (1968), and Poland (1980); the Austrian government's role as a mediator and Vienna as a site for mediation during crises; economic and political relations with Soviet satellite states from the 1960s to the late 1980s; the long path towards creation of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe; limits to Austrian economic integration with Europe imposed by the Soviet Union; and the end of the Cold War. The narrative sweep is comprehensive, and it integrates the essential developments one should expect from a diplomatic history survey text.

Diplomacy is fundamentally transactional, and the table at which parties sit is rarely a level one. Bischof and Ruggenthaler trace a developmental arc that begins with Austria deprived of the agency to participate as a fully sovereign and independent state under National Socialism. The Allies' 1943 Moscow Declaration asserted Austria's dual status as first victim of Nazi aggression *and* as co-responsible for Nazi crimes as a constituent part of the Reich (36ff)—a kind of liminal status that left a great many Austrians confused about why they were treated as a defeated enemy, although it was readily apparent that there had been Nazis in their midst. By November 1945, free and fair elections reestablished formal governance in Austria, though it would be four years before elections would restore a semblance of sovereignty in East or West Germany. The country remained under occupation until 1955, and legislation could be subject to veto by unanimous vote of the Allied Control Council (formal occupation ended in both German states in 1949, with foreign troops recast as protectors of sovereignty).

The authors discuss the Austrian federal government's efforts to satisfy four-power demands, including denazification (not without controversy among the Austrian population, yet supported to some degree or other by the political parties) and the Soviet demand for restitution in the form of "German" assets (42–43), even though some portion of those assets were of Austrian provenance, and a subset of those had been "aryanized" after the Anschluss. The Soviets sought to link an Austrian state treaty with a larger German solution, whereas the Anglo-Americans were wary of Soviet subterfuges that could facilitate the westward reach of Moscow's influence. Austrian federal leadership in the People's Party/Socialist coalition sought to exercise its limited

agency by promising Soviet authorities it would enact permanent neutrality, which helped pave the way for the *Staatsvertrag* in 1955 (84–8; 103–14).

Full sovereignty gained through this treaty established the basis for Austria's position in Europe until the end of the Cold War and beyond. Bischof and Ruggenthaler note that the Second Republic was clearly Western from the perspectives of cultural heritage and commitment to representative democracy, but these characteristics in no way precluded eager and sincere cultivation of good relations with eastern neighbors. Indeed, the *Staatsvertrag* provided Vienna with the opportunity for a new style of diplomacy within these parameters. Austria committed to abstaining from military or political alliances and demonstrated a readiness to engage in trade and cultural exchange with lands of the capitalist West and the state-socialist East. A transactional strategy grounded in reciprocal stability and growth, rather than zero-sum thinking, drove this diplomacy. The Second Republic and its partners could benefit from cooperative economic relationships and respectful political ties; Austria could increasingly serve as a neutral site for international summits, for formal United Nations and other IGO meetings, and as an honest broker to resolve conflicts outside of Europe. Austria's foreign policy of *active* neutrality required judicious, active engagement with the world, not trepidatious restraint.

Continuity characterized Austrian foreign policy over the first postwar decades of grand coalition, when foreign ministers Gruber, Figl, and Raab (all ÖVP), and then Kreisky (SPÖ) worked with successive chancellors and cabinet colleagues to navigate through the occupation years, achieve the restoration of sovereignty, and cultivate relations with European states on either side of the Cold War divide. The authors show how, upon Kreisky's elevation to chancellor in 1970, Austria's diplomatic strategy expanded to include a focus on international development and heightened focus on northern-southern hemisphere relations; Austrian commitment to new, collaborative European security, cultural and economic exchange, and human rights dialogue; and Austrian interest in integration with western European economies. These features of Austrian foreign affairs persisted after Kreisky left office in 1983. Subsequent Austrian governments, regardless of the coalition makeup, continued to pursue these goals through the end of the Cold War and beyond. Two examples will suffice here. First, Bischof and Ruggenthaler point out that compassion shown to successive waves of Hungarian, Czech, and Polish refugees demonstrated Austria's commitment to human rights without violating its neutrality. This lent the Second Republic a certain understated moral authority in CSCE discussions (the fact that the OSCE has its seat in Vienna lends credence to the assertion). Second, Austrian pursuit of integration into

the ECSC/EEC/EU persisted patiently from the 1960s into the 1990s. In the end, it would have to wait until the end of the Cold War, given that the Kremlin long considered this economic arrangement as inherently political (i.e., antagonistic towards state socialism), and thus a violation of Austrian neutrality (228–37). Once Gorbachev formally dropped a long-standing opposition to neutral countries joining the EEC toward the end of 1991, the way opened for Austrian entry into the newly cast European Union by 1995.

“As one of the ‘major battlefields’ in the Cold War,” the authors note at the outset of their study, “Austria has barely received attention in survey accounts in Anglo-American accounts [...]” (17). Where Austrian circumstances are considered in the English-language literature, primary focus lies elsewhere, and Austria tends to receive almost incidental treatment. Bischof and Ruggenthaler do us a great service with this volume, and when the highly anticipated English-language edition appears, they will have addressed the above-noted lacuna definitively. We can be grateful that this original, German-language version offers the most important and accessible diplomacy and international politics-oriented narrative of the subject yet offered. They have established a standard that would be exceedingly difficult to match.