

The Centrality of Neutrality: The Significance of Austria's Geostrategic Location in the Heart of Europe

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On 15 May 1955 at the Belvedere Palace in Vienna, the Austrian government and the four occupying powers of France, Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and the United States signed the Austrian State Treaty, ending ten years of foreign occupation. This act came at the height of the Cold War and procured the first withdrawal of troops by the Soviet Union from territory it had conquered in World War II. At the conclusion of war in 1945, the Allied forces marched into Austria with the Soviet Red Army occupying the eastern portion of the country and British, French, and American troops taking control of the western areas. An Allied Commission for Austria was established to administer the country, in conjunction with a democratically elected Austrian government. As early as 1946 discussions concerning the future of Austria had begun among the Allies, when the Council of Foreign Ministers (CFM) created a committee of deputies to work on drafting a treaty.¹ In the course of the ten-year occupation, there were several moments when the signing of a treaty appeared imminent but failed prior to 1955. Between 1953 and 1955, political changes in the United States, the Soviet Union, and Austria produced various shifts in foreign policy that in turn cultivated fertile ground for the signing of the Austrian State Treaty. During this period, the confluence of internal politics and external events also influenced policy decisions, particularly in the Soviet Union. Thus the Austrian State Treaty was signed in 1955 because the Kremlin leaders decided to drive a wedge between NATO's northern and southern flanks. By stipulating that a Soviet signature would require a post-treaty Austrian declaration of neutrality, Moscow was able to create a geographical division of NATO countries in the heart of Europe.

In examining the various reasons why the Austrian State Treaty was signed and who the key figures were historians have posited an array of arguments. The historiography on the Austrian State Treaty breaks down into three main categories: an American, a Soviet, and an Austrian angle. This does not mean that the historians necessarily fall into these categories based upon nationality or that the boundaries between these categories are solid. The historians instead argue the importance of the actors and events based on the role of the Americans, Soviets, or Austrians in creating the Austrian State Treaty. There is also a gray area for some historians, who do not restrict themselves to emphasizing only one political aspect, but recognize that the Austrian treaty required a concerted effort on behalf of the countries involved.

One school of historiography focuses on the role of the Americans in the negotiations. Stephen E. Ambrose, one of the leading biographers of Dwight D. Eisenhower, significantly emphasizes the President's role in the signing of the Austrian State Treaty. Ambrose lauds Eisenhower as "the western leader most

responsible for the restoration of Austrian freedom.² He bases this assessment on the power of the President in the negotiation process. In Ambrose's analysis, "when Eisenhower stepped forward and offered a deal - a summit³ for Austria's freedom - the troika [Bulganin, Khrushchev, and Zhukov] overcame their reluctance and on May 15, 1955, signed the Austrian treaty."⁴ While Eisenhower, as leader of the United States, undoubtedly played a role in the signing of the Austrian treaty, Ambrose takes a very narrow view of the treaty negotiations. He focuses on the top level of American power, thus excluding key figures and events from the Soviet and Austrian sides, as well as other American negotiators.

Frederick W. Marks III shares Ambrose's view that a successful solution to the treaty depended on the policy decisions of great American men. Marks, however, emphasizes a different Washington policymaker from the 1950s. As a biographer of John Foster Dulles, he credits the Secretary of State with pushing the treaty toward a positive conclusion for both the Americans and the Austrians. Where Ambrose writes, "Eisenhower's most enduring foreign policy contributions were a free Austria,"⁵ Marks counters with "even to this day, the most astute observers of the Eisenhower presidency still find it difficult to say who was at the helm of American foreign policy from 1953 to 1959."⁶ Marks contends that "Dulles has never received as much as half the recognition he deserves for his role in obtaining the Austrian State Treaty."⁷ He credits Dulles' hard bargaining and delay tactics with the Soviets for producing the treaty.⁸ Marks even uses the anecdote that Dulles "ordered his plane readied for the trip home"⁹ should the Soviets not reduce their demands on the day the treaty was scheduled to be signed. While Marks certainly brings the contributions of Secretary of State Dulles to the forefront, he, too, neglects the work of the Soviets and Austrians in negotiating the treaty. In referring to Dulles' "eleventh-hour triumph . . . [as] the evacuation of the Red Armies from Austria,"¹⁰ Marks ignores the fact that when the Viennese crowds came to cheer the signing of the treaty, they were also celebrating the newly achieved independence of their country, which included the withdrawal of American troops.¹¹ Marks' and Ambrose's analyses of Dulles and Eisenhower give a one-sided, American-centered account of the factors influencing the formation of the Austrian State Treaty. Their interpretations have most likely been influenced by their bias toward their subjects and the role that they feel these men played in shaping the world.

The second major category in the historiography debate on the treaty looks at the role of the Soviet leaders and their motives for ending the occupation of Austria. The Czech historian Vojtech Mastny is one of the strongest proponents in support of the Soviet contribution to the treaty. In his article, in which he refers to the Soviets as the "Godfathers of Austrian Neutrality", Mastny argues that "Austrian neutrality originated in Moscow. The 1955 State Treaty, which made neutrality possible, could only come about because the key Soviet leaders had changed their mind, and finally approved of a neutral status for Austria."¹² He remarks that the Soviets blocked progress on the treaty negotiations because they refused to separate the German and Austrian question. As Mastny notes, however, "making the Austrian settlement contingent upon the prior solution of the German question, and thus postponing both solutions indefinitely, was integral to that Stalinist tactic, whose obsolescence became clear by late 1954."¹³ By 1954 the stage was set for West Germany's integration into

NATO,¹⁴ and Mastny argues that Soviet concerns about the expansion of NATO led them to seek the Austrian State Treaty. By signing a treaty in return for Austrian neutrality, the Soviets initiated "political developments calculated to diminish the cold war's military dimensions."¹⁵ He also credits Khrushchev with developing this plan to counteract Western military expansion.¹⁶ Finally, Mastny recognizes the Austrians and the surprising negotiating power they displayed at the bilateral talks in Moscow.¹⁷ The majority of his article, however, centers on Soviet motives for signing the treaty. His emphasis on the Soviet Union comes perhaps from his Czech background and the experience of living in a Soviet satellite state, where nothing seemed to happen without prior Kremlin approval.

Gerald Stourzh, an Austrian historian, responds to Mastny's analysis with the argument: "If the Soviets were the godfathers, there was also a godmother, in the unlikely person of John Foster Dulles."¹⁸ Stourzh credits the American Secretary of State for his proposal at the Berlin CFM in 1954, where he suggested that the Western powers would support a neutral Austria on the Swiss model. He then notes that "this became the Soviets' most persuasive argument in their bilateral talks with the Austrians in Moscow in April 1955."¹⁹ In emphasizing Dulles' suggestion, Stourzh refutes Mastny's claim that the Soviets were responsible for Austrian neutrality. The Soviets instead used the Dulles proposal to negotiate with the Austrians during their bilateral talks in Moscow. While Stourzh credits Dulles with playing an important role in the formation of Austrian neutrality, unlike Marks he also recognizes the Austrian initiative in turning to the Kremlin leaders for bilateral talks "with a purpose of de-blocking the State Treaty issue."²⁰ Stourzh is quick to point out, however, that "the non-solution of the Austrian question in 1953 or 1954, and its solution in 1955 depended less on the lesser or greater weight of Austrian 'leverage,'²¹ and more on different power constellations and policy determinations in the Kremlin."²² Stourzh's ultimate analysis coincides with Mastny's interpretation of the political motive behind the Soviet signature on the treaty: "What was most essential . . . was the world wide attempt to push back American influence with political rather than military means . . ."²³ While Stourzh provides a more balanced view of the contributors to the Austrian treaty, he leaves no doubt that without Soviet consent there would not have been a treaty in 1955.

Another Austrian historian, Michael Gehler, provides a different perspective on the motives of the Soviet Union in signing the Austrian State Treaty. Gehler remarks that "for Kremlin decision makers the withdrawal of occupation forces from the Soviet zone of Austria was designed to send a strong signal for initiating East-West detente in general and solve the German question in particular."²⁴ He, too, emphasizes West Germany's impending membership into NATO as a key factor in the decision by Soviet leaders to withdraw from Austria. Gehler argues that the Kremlin wanted to use Austria to create an alternative example for the Germans. "Even though the Paris Agreements of October 1954 had been signed, they still were up for ratification in the national parliaments in the spring of 1955. With the Austrian model for the German question, Kremlin diplomacy hoped to derail the ratification process."²⁵ The Soviets hoped to lure the Germans away from Western integration and toward unification and neutrality on the Austrian model. Gehler notes, however, that Austria succeeded because "unlike the Federal Republic of Germany, Austria did

not put its faith in the hands of other powers but negotiated with Moscow on its own.²⁶ The Austrian government took a chance in going to Moscow for bilateral talks, but “the courage to take risks paid off: Austria became independent and free.”²⁷ Gehler recognizes that while the Soviets intended to use the Austrian treaty in a wider diplomatic context, the Austrians were the ultimate beneficiaries of Soviet policy. Since Gehler looks at multiple factors influencing the formation of the treaty, he provides a fairly balanced analysis.

Even though he is an American historian writing in the mid-1960s, William Bader also looks at the impact of Soviet policy on the Austrian State Treaty. Bader notes that “after the death of Stalin in 1953, the style of the Soviet Union’s holding action in Austria changed noticeably” but the changes “did not mean that in 1953 Russia was willing to withdraw.”²⁸ While Stalin’s death altered Soviet actions with regard to Austria, Bader also recognizes that the Berlin CFM in 1954 indicated that the Soviet leaders were not yet ready to negotiate solely over Austria but that they intended to link the Austrian question together with that of Germany.²⁹ “Not a year later, however, came the volte-face of February 8, 1955,³⁰ and the door was opened to an Austrian settlement . . .”³¹ Bader acknowledges the significance of this event in the broader context of Soviet strategy and considers the Austrian treaty to be part of Khrushchev’s larger plan to initiate East-West détente.³² In a further analysis of Soviet policy, Bader also looks at the Soviet signature on the treaty as attempting to create a model for other European countries. He remarks that “the most compelling justifications for Khrushchev’s action, however, . . . [was] a long-term calculation that the Austrian settlement would serve as a model - an inducement for some to accept demilitarization, for others to point up the advantages of staying out of military alliances.”³³ Bader’s analysis also critiques Dulles and the American role in the treaty, noting that “in the Austrian case the United States only grudgingly came to accept the idea of neutrality.”³⁴ Bader, however, does not give the Austrians any credit for their involvement in seeking a treaty. Writing against the background of the Cold War perhaps biased Bader’s interpretation of the conflict as primarily influenced by the two superpowers.

Writing twenty years after Bader, Audrey Kurth Cronin is unique as an American historian because she addresses the role of the Austrians in her study. She reaches the same conclusion as Bader, however, on the importance of Stalin’s death. In her assessment, the death of the Soviet leader not only brought power changes in the Kremlin but also foreign policy changes, particularly concerning the occupation of Austria.³⁵ Cronin notes, however, that even in the wake of the power changes, “the disagreement over Austria’s future often had little to do with Austria itself and much more to do with the course of the Cold War.”³⁶ Cronin emphasizes, as other historians also have, that Austria is part of the broader issue of the Western integration of the Federal Republic of Germany, and the Soviets refused to separate the two questions. Her hypothesis is that “had Soviet threats concerning the future of Austria succeeded in putting off German rearmament, the Austrian State Treaty would probably not have been signed in May 1955.”³⁷ Cronin thus minimizes the role of the Western powers in favor of the importance of Soviet decisions. “Internal Soviet considerations and events outside Austria” played a larger part in the signing of the treaty than any of the negotiations between the Soviet Union and the Western

Allies.³⁸ In her analysis, the key figure in the Soviet decision-making process was Nikita Khrushchev, who intended "to use the treaty to initiate an East-West détente in Europe."³⁹ Cronin also addresses the role of the Austrian government in the negotiations. "Although Austria never controlled its own fate, in the early 1950s the Austrians occasionally exercised a leverage with respect to the Western powers which was out of proportion to the small country's strength."⁴⁰

The Austrian historian Günter Bischof's assessment of the role the Austrians played in procuring their own freedom forms the final category of historiography. Bischof's argument for the importance of the Austrians in negotiating their own independence begins with the death of Stalin and "his successors [who] signalled a departure of post-Stalinist foreign policy towards 'peaceful coexistence'."⁴¹ This change prompted Austrian Chancellor Julius Raab to test "the Soviets in bilateral contacts to explore the meaning of 'peaceful coexistence' for Austria."⁴² Bischof then credits Raab with proposing "neutrality as a means of getting rid of the occupation powers."⁴³ In Bischof's analysis, Khrushchev's willingness to negotiate with the Austrians in Moscow was merely "the culmination of Raab's bilateral diplomacy."⁴⁴ Thus, Bischof's conclusion is that "Austria's risky diplomacy and hard-won independence in 1955 demonstrated to the world that the weak had leverage in the Cold War."⁴⁵ Bischof regards as necessary Austria's initiative on the matter of bilateral negotiations to achieve a treaty because the Western powers were slow in reacting to the Soviets. He criticizes American foreign policy, noting that "Eisenhower refused to negotiate with the Kremlin leadership, let alone meet them on the summit level to test the sincerity of their peace offensive."⁴⁶ Without the Austrians, Bischof's argument indicates that there may not have been a treaty in 1955.

In the introduction to his book, Günter Bischof discusses the recent changes in Cold War scholarship. He notes that new historiography largely looks at new sources, including German language scholarship and the mostly untapped archival sources in Moscow.⁴⁷ This shift in historiography occurs in the late 1980s and early 1990s with the fall of Communism across Europe. Bischof also criticizes "traditional American Cold War scholarship [that] has largely ignored Austria as an important case study contributing to the origins of the Cold War and aggravating East-West conflict."⁴⁸ Stephen Ambrose and Frederick Marks fall into this classification. They barely touch on the role of Austria in the Cold War, and when they do, it is only to praise their subjects (Eisenhower and Dulles) for solving the Austrian question. They are looking at the bigger picture of the Cold War confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union and the role of great men in shaping it, which ignores the role and impact of the smaller state. The American historian Bader, writing in the mid-1960s, also falls into the same trap by leaving the Austrian leaders out of his analysis of Soviet and American actions in treaty negotiations. At the height of Cold War tensions, it might have been easy to overlook those states that were not members of a military security pact.

The other historians, who have tried to touch upon multiple factors in their assessment of the formation of the treaty, generally have a European background and are writing near or after the end of the Cold War. The fall of Communism, in which the satellite states in Eastern Europe broke away from the Soviet Union, undoubtedly contributed to a new type of historiography on the Austrian State Treaty as well.

Those newly liberated countries demonstrated that smaller states can have an impact on their future. The Austrian historian Bischof writes from this perspective but probably takes his assessment the farthest by crediting the Austrians with attaining their treaty. While he currently lives in the United States, his Austrian background has perhaps led him to overemphasize the importance of the Austrians. Stourzh and Cronin, who is the lone American to examine the Austrian role, provide a more balanced view, recognizing that without the Austrian initiative, the lull in treaty negotiations may very well have continued. Their assessment that the power to make a decision on Austria was always with the Soviets is perhaps most legitimate.

The varying arguments of these historians indicate that one event can produce a myriad of interpretations. The range of scholarship also demonstrates, as Bischof noted, that the study of history changes with time. Traditionally, the Cold War meant the superpower struggle between the United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. The conflict brought the superpowers to confrontation and led them to the brink of nuclear destruction. The two sides engaged in an ideological fight intended to win, or when necessary force, converts into their camp. There was no supposed gray area in this fight: It was East versus West. What, however, did this superpower confrontation of the Cold War mean for the smaller states? What sort of impact did it have on those countries not strong enough to join the fray as superpowers? For Korea, it divided the country in 1953 along the 38th Parallel. In 1954, it meant the existence of two Germanys. For Europe, it partitioned a continent from the Baltic to the Black Seas. Yet on this line, or "iron curtain"⁴⁹ as Winston Churchill first called it, there was a country that somehow remained unified without officially joining either side. Austria, decimated by two world wars and constituting the rump state of the once mighty Habsburg Empire, found a gray area between East and West and maintained the territorial sovereignty of its land. The foundation for this Austrian achievement was military neutrality and the act that paved the way for it was the Austrian State Treaty of 1955.

The treaty was signed in 1955 because the Kremlin leaders decided to drive a wedge between NATO's northern and southern flanks. By stipulating that a Soviet signature would require a post-treaty Austrian declaration of neutrality, Moscow was able to create a geographical division of NATO countries in the heart of Europe. Between 1953 and 1955, treaty negotiations followed an unstable course of peaks and valleys leading to the final signature. During this time, there were four critical moments: the power changes of 1953 in the United States, the Soviet Union, and Austria; John Foster Dulles' statement on a suitable neutrality at the Berlin CFM in 1954; the growing influence of Nikita S. Khrushchev in early 1955; and the Austrian acceptance of the Soviet invitation to Moscow for bilateral talks in the spring of 1955. Two events external to the Austrian issue were also important. These included the expansion of NATO to incorporate the Federal Republic of Germany and the creation of the Warsaw Pact, both of which occurred in early May 1955. In this atmosphere, which sharpened the lines between East and West, Austria found a third option.

While the signing of the Austrian State Treaty in May 1955 was still more than two years away, the first quarter of 1953 had a tremendous impact on the future of Austria. In January, Dwight D. Eisenhower replaced Harry S. Truman and became the thirty-fourth President of the United States. The new Republican President had been

in the White House little more than a month when Austria also elected a new government on 22 February 1953.⁵⁰ While this election did not alter the coalition between the People's Party and the Socialists, it did bring about the appointment of a new chancellor. Julius Raab from the People's Party replaced fellow party member Leopold Figl at the head of the Austrian government. Llewelyn Thompson, the United States High Commissioner for Austria, commented on Raab's selection: "There is no doubt that Raab will give stronger leadership and his designation will satisfy the strong PP [People's Party] feeling of need for a change."⁵¹ In 1955, Raab would assert his leadership and prove Thompson correct.

The most important political change, however, came out of Moscow. On 5 March 1953, the death of Joseph Stalin ushered in a new era for the Soviet Union. An American diplomatic official in Moscow sent a telegram to Washington, relaying the new distribution of power in the Kremlin. Georgii Malenkov would be the government and party leader, Lavrentii Beria would run security, Vyacheslav Molotov would oversee foreign policy, and Nikolai Bulganin would handle army affairs.⁵² The name of Nikita Khrushchev was, in hindsight, conspicuously absent from this list. As President Eisenhower noted in his memoirs, U.S. intelligence believed that the new Soviet leadership would be a "government by committee."⁵³ The era of dominance by a single person was over in the Kremlin.

On 15 March 1953, Malenkov gave a speech designed to reflect the new look in the Kremlin through an innovative approach to foreign policy. In addressing the Supreme Soviet, "Malenkov spoke briefly on foreign policy matters and included the following statement: 'At present there is no disputed or unsolved question which could not be settled by peaceful means on the basis of mutual agreement of the countries concerned. This concerns our relations with all states, including the United States of America.'⁵⁴ Malenkov's speech presented a change in Soviet foreign policy commonly referred to as "peaceful coexistence." Instead of confrontation, the Soviets were looking to lessen the tensions of the Cold War. This speech seemed to indicate that where conflict existed the leaders in the Kremlin were willing to compromise to reach a solution to the problem. Malenkov's offer was clear: this included the United States.

The American reaction to the Soviet initiative was less than enthusiastic, however. On 16 April 1953, President Eisenhower responded to Malenkov and the Soviets with a speech to the American Society of Newspaper Editors entitled "The Chance for Peace." Eisenhower invoked the unified spirit of April 1945, but remarked that "this common purpose lasted an instant and perished. The nations of the world divided to follow two distinct roads."⁵⁵ Instead of offering to meet the Soviets at the negotiating table to bridge this gap, the President chose instead to challenge the Kremlin leadership. Among his comments, he acknowledged Malenkov's proposal with this reply: "We welcome every honest act of peace. We care nothing for mere rhetoric. We are only for sincerity of peaceful purpose attested by deeds."⁵⁶ Eisenhower spelled out one of those deeds as "the Soviet Union's signature upon an Austrian treaty."⁵⁷ The indication from the United States was that the Soviet proposal for peace would have to take a more concrete form; words would not suffice.⁵⁸

In spite of Eisenhower's remarks, however, the United States did initiate contact with the Soviets over the possibility of treaty negotiations. In May of 1953, "the

Secretary General of the treaty deputies . . . called for a meeting to be held at London on May 27.⁵⁹ The Soviet Union turned down this offer for a meeting on the grounds that only the Council of Foreign Ministers and not the deputies had the power to call a meeting. They also noted that the deputies had been meeting since 1947 with no conclusive result and thus another round of meetings would also prove unproductive.⁶⁰ In the course of the summer and early autumn of 1953 the Soviets offered many excuses for attending neither a deputies conference nor a foreign ministers conference.⁶¹ This stance directly contradicted Malenkov's speech and the supposed peace initiative of the new Soviet foreign policy. The Kremlin leaders weakened their argument in favor of mutual conflict resolution when they would not even come to the bargaining table.

One reason for Moscow's refusal to meet with Western leaders hinged on an issue known as the "short treaty." In March 1952 and without consulting the Soviets, the Americans, British, and French submitted an abbreviated version of the state treaty to the Kremlin. This treaty was to replace the long draft of 1949, upon which the four occupying powers had agreed outside of a few points.⁶² After reviewing this treaty, the Kremlin made it clear that future progress on Austria required the "withdrawal of the proposal re[garding] the so-called 'abbreviated treaty.'"⁶³ At the time of American willingness to meet in 1953 to work on the Austrian State Treaty, the "short treaty" remained the official submission of the Western powers. The Soviets reiterated their concern over the "short treaty" and again emphasized the withdrawal of this treaty as the grounds for resuming negotiations.⁶⁴ The United States indicated "that they were prepared to accept any treaty which would insure Austria's political and economic independence."⁶⁵ Yet the "short treaty" was not officially withdrawn until November 1953.⁶⁶ Neither side of this confrontation was without reproach in their tactics for creating an atmosphere ill-suited for negotiations. Once various obstacles were overcome, however, the four occupying powers and Austria met in Berlin in the winter of 1954 for discussions pertaining to the signing of an Austrian State Treaty.

From 25 January until 18 February 1954, the Council of Foreign Ministers met in Berlin for their first conference in five years. The secretaries and ministers of foreign affairs from Britain, France, the Soviet Union, and the United States were in attendance. On the first day that the CFM convened to discuss the issue of Austria, the Austrians also submitted a request to participate, which was subsequently granted. The significant figures at the Berlin Conference were the American Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, the Soviet Minister of Foreign Affairs Vyacheslav Molotov, and the Austrian Foreign Minister Leopold Figl.⁶⁷ In honoring Molotov's request, the Austrian State Treaty was the third item on the agenda, with the issue of a five-power CFM and the German question taking first and second priority respectively.⁶⁸ As a result of this agenda, the discussions concerning Austria first occurred on 12 February. Despite the lack of productivity in the earlier portion of the conference, Dulles expressed optimism regarding the Austrian issue: "We are here today in a meeting which may have historic consequences. From it may come the kind of accomplishment which the whole world has been expecting of this conference; but which after nearly three weeks has not yet been forthcoming."⁶⁹

On the first day of meetings dealing with Austria, however, Molotov presented the committee with a set of new Soviet proposals that essentially blocked any further

progress in Berlin for concluding an Austrian State Treaty. Two components from these proposals brought about strong opposition from the Western powers and Austria. These included a provision "in the text of the State Treaty with Austria [of] the following additional article: 'Austria undertakes not to enter into any coalition or military alliance directed against any Power which participated with its armed forces in the war against Germany and in the liberation of Austria. Austria undertakes further not to permit the establishment on its territory of foreign military bases and not to permit the use of foreign military instructors and specialists in Austria.'⁷⁰ The other noteworthy Soviet suggestion linked the withdrawal of troops from Austria to a peace treaty between Germany and the former Allied Powers. In defense of these changes to the previous draft of the state treaty, the Soviet Union argued that they were protecting Austria from "a new Anschluss."⁷¹ The Russians' concern was that "in the absence of a German peace treaty no satisfactory guarantees are possible against resurgence of West German militarism."⁷² Molotov manipulated the Soviet concern regarding the status of Germany to overshadow the discussions on Austria.

These proposals were not well received by the Western powers and Austria. In a top-secret memo from Dulles to Eisenhower, the Secretary of State communicated to the President that "Molotov's presentation last night regarding Austria seemed to destroy [the] last lingering hope of any substantial agreement here. It turned the clock back on Austria and cut [the] heart out of proposed treaty by providing for indefinite Soviet occupation so that treaty would not be treaty of liberation but of servitude."⁷³ In arguing Austria's opposition to the Soviet proposals, Foreign Minister Figl noted that the "principal problem is to end occupation [of] Austria."⁷⁴ The French Minister of Foreign Affairs also articulated several concerns on behalf of the Western powers. These included linking the Austrian solution to a German peace treaty, which would only further damage Austria through continued financial support of the occupation forces and which would inhibit the independence of the country. He noted as well that article 4 of the treaty already prohibited a future Anschluss.⁷⁵

The most important and perhaps most eloquent argument against the Soviet suggestions came from Secretary of State Dulles. In addressing the Soviet desire for including in the treaty a statement that would prohibit the Austrians from joining any military alliances or allowing foreign military bases on their soil, Dulles countered with a plan for the neutrality of Austria that would be acceptable to the Western powers. He criticized the Soviets for insisting that these clauses for the neutralization of Austria be included in the wording of the treaty itself, and instead offered this interpretation:

A neutral status is an honorable status if it is voluntarily chosen by a nation. Switzerland has chosen to be neutral, and as a neutral she had achieved an honorable place in the family of nations. Under the Austrian state treaty as heretofore drafted, Austria would be free to choose for itself to be a neutral state like Switzerland. Certainly the United States would fully respect its choice in this respect, as it fully respects the comparable choice of the Swiss nation.

However, it is one thing for a nation to choose to be neutral and it is another thing to have neutrality forcibly imposed on it by other nations as a perpetual servitude.⁷⁶

While the remainder of the conference produced little or no progress on an Austrian State Treaty, Dulles' rebuttal of the Soviet method for neutralizing Austria laid the foundation for an eventual treaty and subsequent declaration of neutrality by the Austrians. Molotov's proposals, however, stalled treaty talks for the remainder of 1954.

As evidenced by his demands at the Berlin Conference, Molotov's foreign policy did not follow the more compromising approach presented by Malenkov in the spring of 1953. In his memoirs, Molotov acknowledged that in his role as Minister of Foreign Affairs after Stalin's death he operated very independently, but "within the limits of . . . [his] instructions."⁷⁷ This last statement seems to indicate that the other leaders in the Kremlin had sanctioned Molotov's hard-line policies, yet his self-styled independence when dealing with matters of foreign policy brought him into conflict with the rising Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev. Molotov did not support the Soviet slogan of "peaceful coexistence," believing that it undermined the teachings of Marx and Lenin. He argued rather that Communism meant the "overthrow of imperialism"⁷⁸ and this could not be achieved through a policy of "peaceful coexistence." Molotov believed that "war is inevitable as long as imperialism exists."⁷⁹ Thus for him, "peaceful coexistence" was an empty phrase because its meaning was the antithesis to war, and only war could bring peace.⁸⁰

At the beginning of 1955, however, Khrushchev had begun to consolidate his power as first secretary of the Central Committee and leader of the Presidium of the Central Committee.⁸¹ Khrushchev's control over Kremlin politics marked the transformation of "peaceful coexistence" from theory to policy. Khrushchev and the implementation of "peaceful coexistence" were the spark for a solution to the Austrian question.⁸² In his memoirs, Khrushchev remarked on the hypocrisy of pursuing "peaceful coexistence" while keeping Soviet troops in Austria: "We were increasing our efforts on behalf of peaceful coexistence, and we were seeking the withdrawal of troops by other countries that occupied foreign territories. Yet our troops were in Austria."⁸³ He also acknowledged that this policy of continued occupation came from Stalin and Molotov and was continued after Stalin's death by Molotov.⁸⁴ Khrushchev "felt that . . . [the Soviet Union] needed to be done with the matter of Austria. As minister of foreign affairs, Molotov was not taking any initiative on it."⁸⁵ Thus Khrushchev approached Molotov with the argument that if the Soviets were not preparing for war, then there was no purpose in keeping troops in Austria.⁸⁶ Based on this assessment, which was founded on "peaceful coexistence," the Soviets began preparations to renew negotiations for an Austrian State Treaty.

At the beginning of 1955 the Soviets made public their new intentions regarding Austria. The historian Audrey Kurth Cronin noted that "the surprising Soviet about-face on Austria was announced by Molotov himself on 8 February 1955, in a speech before the Supreme Soviet. . . . Molotov announced that the Soviet Union would consider signing an Austrian treaty even without a German peace treaty, provided that there was a firm guarantee against Anschluss and that a conference on both Germany and Austria be convened without delay."⁸⁷ While the Soviets were finally willing to separate the German and Austrian questions, the American government viewed Molotov's speech with a great deal of suspicion. They were wary of the hidden undertones regarding Germany and believed that the Kremlin was actually

looking for a reason to bring the Western powers to the negotiating table in order to address the issue of Germany. The American fear in the immediate aftermath of Molotov's speech was that the Soviets wanted to use Austria as a pretext to block the rearmament and military integration of West Germany into NATO.⁸⁸

Throughout the course of nearly ten years of negotiations over Austria, the German issue persistently overshadowed and delayed a solution to the Austrian problem. The Soviets made Germany a catch-22 for solving the Austrian question. In October 1954, however, the Kremlin was suddenly faced with the very real prospect that West Germany would join NATO, which would bring the country definitively into the Western fold and facilitate rearmament. The Paris agreements, signed on 23 October, laid the foundation for German integration into NATO.⁸⁹ All that was needed was the ratification of the accords for them to take effect. Once ratification occurred, the Soviet Union would be faced with NATO directly at the border of its communist satellites. Thus the United States distrusted the Soviet initiative on Austria for fear that the ulterior motive of the Kremlin was to delay ratification through a four-power conference.⁹⁰

While the United States could refuse to meet with the Soviet Union until after ratification of the Paris agreements, they could not stop the Austrians from accepting the Soviet invitation for bilateral talks in Moscow. On 24 March Molotov replied to an Austrian memorandum, which had been written in response to his speech, and "mentioned . . . that the Soviet Government would welcome a visit of the Austrian Chancellor and other officials in the near future."⁹¹ Prior to Austrian acceptance of Molotov's invitation, Secretary of State Dulles indicated that the United States would not stop an Austrian delegation from engaging in bilateral talks with the Soviet Union. He noted, however, "that he assumes Chancellor Raab would not go to Moscow under the impression that he could speak for the U.S."⁹² The Austrians could go to the Kremlin with American approval but without authorization to conclude a treaty.

The stance of the American government had changed drastically since 1953 when the Austrians had previously attempted to enter into bilateral negotiations with the Soviets. In his memoirs, Bruno Kreisky, who was the state secretary under Raab, related the Austrian attempt in the summer of 1953 to broach the subject of neutrality with the Soviets. As Kreisky recollected, "Karl Gruber, our foreign minister at the time, met with Pandit Nehru. Raab had expressly authorized Gruber to ask the Indian Prime Minister for mediation in Moscow. The Indian diplomat Menon reported a little later that Molotov declared it was not enough."⁹³ Not only did Molotov reject the Austrian proposal, but the Austrians also had to face American displeasure at Austro-Soviet contacts. Llewelyn Thompson met with Chancellor Raab and Foreign Minister Gruber to express the dissatisfaction of the United States, stating "that whatever intention Gruber approach to Nehru, . . . fact it was made without informing US very disturbing, particularly reference by Indian Ambassador to neutrality which might make Soviets think they had only to press for this in order [to] obtain it."⁹⁴ Thompson also indicated in his report that he made the Austrians aware of their "duty to consult with US before making any move concerning her future."⁹⁵ By 1955, however, the stringency of the American position had slightly abated, and the United States was willing to approve bilateral talks between the Austrians and Soviets.

Thus from 12 to 15 April, delegations from both Austria and the Soviet Union met in Moscow in order to facilitate agreement between the two countries on certain issues pertaining to an Austrian State Treaty. On 15 April, they issued a joint memorandum outlining the results of their discussions.⁹⁶ From the Austrian side, the delegation of Chancellor Raab, Vice Chancellor Schärff, Foreign Minister Figl, and State Secretary Kreisky, clarified their intentions regarding neutrality. In the memorandum, the Austrians referred back to the Berlin Conference of 1954 and noted that Austria would not join any military alliances or allow foreign military bases on their territory and that they would "practice . . . a neutrality of the type maintained by Switzerland."⁹⁷ The Austrians went on to stipulate that the declaration of neutrality would come from an act of parliament following the signing of the treaty.⁹⁸ At the Berlin CFM, talks broke down partly because the Soviets had insisted that this declaration of neutrality should be included in the treaty itself. Thus, the Soviets appeared to have backed down on at least one of their previous demands.

A second significant change to the Soviet stance came in their portion of the memorandum. The Soviet delegation of Molotov and Mikhoyan reversed their insistence, made at the Berlin CFM, that occupation troops should remain in Austria until a peace treaty with Germany was signed. Instead, they now proffered an "agreement that all occupation troops of the four powers be withdrawn from Austria after the entry into force of the State Treaty, no later than on the 31st of December 1955."⁹⁹ In the span of just four days, the Kremlin reversed its policy on two key points of contention and stated that "the Soviet Government is prepared to sign the Austrian State Treaty without delay."¹⁰⁰ The Soviet Union then issued a call for a new CFM to be held between the four occupying powers and Austria to reach a solution "for the restoration of an independent, democratic Austria."¹⁰¹

The Soviet proposal for a meeting to sign the Austrian State Treaty met with a positive reaction in the governments of the United States, Great Britain, and France. While noting that agreement on certain issues was still needed, the Western powers suggested "that the Ambassadors together with Austrian representatives should meet in Vienna on 2 May. As soon as the necessary preparations have been completed, the earliest practicable date should then be set for the Foreign Ministers to meet and sign the treaty."¹⁰² As a result of the Soviet-Austrian talks in April and the subsequent correspondence between the occupying powers, the Vienna Ambassadorial Conference was held from 2 May to 15 May, on which date the Austrian State Treaty was finally signed.

In a report to the President, Secretary of State Dulles viewed the treaty as a success because Austria would be "a sovereign, independent, and democratic State."¹⁰³ In addition to the previous Soviets concessions regarding an Austrian declaration of neutrality rather than an inclusion of neutrality in the treaty and the withdrawal of occupation troops by the end of 1955 at the latest, the Soviets also compromised on several other political and economic issues. The Soviets had agreed to delete from the treaty stipulations that would have restricted the size of an Austrian army. They also acquiesced on important economic issues, including the return of "extensive oil and shipping properties, other business and industrial enterprises and agricultural lands." In addition, "the Austrian Government . . . agreed to compensate the Soviet Government for the properties thus relinquished" in exchange for "\$150 million in

goods.¹⁰⁴ As described here, the treaty satisfied practically all of the Western demands. Why, therefore, did the Soviet Union sign the Austrian State Treaty? What practical advantage did they see in their compromise with the Western powers?

When the Soviets invited the Austrians to Moscow for bilateral talks, American diplomatic officials asked the same type of questions. Why were the Soviets doing this? What did they hope to achieve? Charles Bohlen, the United States Ambassador to the Soviet Union offered a possible reason for the Soviet initiative. He believed "that [the] chief immediate motivation of [the] Soviets in reopening [the] Austrian question is to endeavor to insure neutralization of Austria in order to prevent military integration [of] three Western zones of Austria into NATO . . ." ¹⁰⁵ In early May 1955, two events external to the Austrian issue demonstrated that Bohlen's assessment in April was the most plausible explanation behind the Soviet motivation for signing the Austrian State Treaty.

The two events were the integration of Germany into NATO on 5 May 1955 and the formation of the Warsaw Pact on 14 May 1955. The first event directly precipitated the second as elaborated in the preamble to the Warsaw Pact, which stated that "the integration of Western Germany in the North Atlantic bloc, . . . increases the threat of another war and creates a menace to the national security of the peaceloving states, . . ." ¹⁰⁶ By signing the Austrian State Treaty with the stipulation that Austria would then declare neutrality, the Soviet Union could protect against Western Austria also following the West German example and militarily integrating with Western Europe. ¹⁰⁷ Not only would this prevent Austria from military joining the West, but through Austrian neutrality the Soviets could also drive a wedge between NATO's northern and southern flanks because Austria would divide Germany from Italy. In the event of armed hostilities between the countries in NATO and the Warsaw Pact, the geographical position of Austria in the heart of Europe would force a strategic break in the NATO defense line. Thus in giving up Austria, the Soviets were hoping to gain a geostrategic advantage should the Cold War ever turn hot.

Throughout treaty negotiations, the Soviet refusal to resolve the Austrian question without a prior solution for Germany continually delayed progress on Austria. Ironically, however, the remilitarization of West Germany suddenly forced the Soviets to act on Austria. The Soviet signature on the treaty was only possible, however, in light of earlier events, particularly from 1953 to 1955. Stalin's death in 1953 shuffled power in the Soviet Union and produced a collective style of leadership among his successors. As a result, Soviet policy did not always follow the purported Soviet theory. This was most evident at the Berlin CFM in 1954, when Molotov's demands blocked any further progress in the negotiations. Khrushchev's consolidation of power, however, forced Molotov to support the new Soviet policy of "peaceful coexistence," which entailed making certain concessions in order to reduce the tension between East and West. As a result, the Soviets renewed contacts, first with the Austrians and then with the other occupying powers, that ultimately led to the signing of the Austrian State Treaty. Moreover, had the Austrians, and particularly Chancellor Raab, not been willing to take the risk of going to Moscow alone to discuss the treaty with the Kremlin leaders, the subsequent meeting of the four powers and Austria may well have been further postponed.¹⁰⁸ Finally, John

Foster Dulles has to be given credit for defining a form of Austrian neutrality that would be acceptable to the Western powers. In the end it was this suggestion of neutrality that the Soviets used to take advantage of Austria's geostrategic location to drive a wedge between the NATO countries in Central Europe.

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- ³ Ambrose is referring to the Geneva Summit, which took place in July 1955.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, 16.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, 20.
- ⁶ Frederick W. Marks III, *Power and Peace: The Diplomacy of John Foster Dulles* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1993), 19.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, xi.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, 52-54.
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- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, x.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, 55.
- ¹² Vojtech Mastorny, "The Soviet Godfathers of Austrian Neutrality," in *Contemporary Austrian Studies*, ed. Günter Bischof, et al., vol. 9, *Neutrality in Austria*, ed. Günter Bischof, Anton Pelinka, and Ruth Wodak (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2001), 240.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, 241.

- 14 The Paris Agreements of 1954 paved the way for German rearmament and Western integration through membership in NATO.
- 15 *Ibid.*, 243.
- 16 *Ibid.*
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- 19 *Ibid.*, 279.
- 20 *Ibid.*, 284.
- 21 With this comment, Stourzh is critiquing the thesis of Günter Bischof, which will be addressed later in the paper.
- 22 *Ibid.*, 285.
- 23 *Ibid.*, 282.
- 24 Michael Gehler, "State Treaty and Neutrality: The Austrian Solution in 1955 as a 'Model' for Germany?," in *Contemporary Austrian Studies*, ed. Erich Thöni, et al., vol. 3, *Austria in the Nineteen Fifties*, ed. Günter Bischof, Anton Pelinka, and Rolf Steininger (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1995), 39.
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⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 135.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

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⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 184.

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⁷⁸ Ibid., 388.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 332.

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⁸⁵ Ibid., 75.

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⁸⁷ Cronin, *Great Power*, 145. "At the same session of the Supreme Soviet, Malenkov tendered his resignation from the premiership." (Ibid.) Khrushchev had made a major move toward consolidation of his power through Malenkov's resignation.

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¹⁰⁸ For historiography supporting the role of the Austrians, see above pp. 5-7 and 9-11.