

## ‘Austrian neutrality’ from the Corriere della Sera (16 May 1955)

**Caption:** On 16 May 1955, the Italian daily newspaper Corriere della Sera analyses the geopolitical and military implications of the signing of the State Treaty on 15 May 1955 which grants Austria neutrality.

**Source:** Corriere della Sera. 16.05.1955, n° 116; anno 80. Milano: Corriere della Sera. "Austria neutrale", auteur:Caleffi, Camillo , p. 1.

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## Austrian neutrality

The peace treaty with Austria that has been signed in Vienna, ten years on from the capitulation of the Reich, marks a return to the situation brought into being at Saint Germain on 10 September 1919. The unassuming Republic of Austria is still to be found beyond unchanged borders and, craving peace after the convulsions of forty years of war and political upheavals, it will need no coercion at all to continue to prefer neutral status. It is very unlikely that the military restrictions laid down in the treaty will be circumvented, partly because the financial resources available are insufficient to bear the burden of substantial armament. Austria's armed forces, strictly commensurate with the requirements and the duties of reasonable defence against any aggression, will be offensive neither in character nor in spirit. Nor are surprises like the Anschluss to be expected because, above all, the independence of Austria is now guaranteed by the Great Powers of both the East and the West.

The imminent rebirth of the liberty of the Republic of Austria does, however, have some significant military consequences resulting from the present political shape of Europe and the persistent crisis in international relations. This small Republic, which stretches from Switzerland to Hungary, from the Rhine to the Danube, over a wide-ranging area of the Alps' northern slopes, will form a continuous neutral zone between the two main sectors of NATO's defence organisation, Central and Southern Europe. Some of the elements characteristic of the plans of the Allied Forces Command in Europe are therefore set to disappear. A long section of the security cordon that follows the dividing line between Western and Eastern Europe until it joins up at Marburg on the Drava River, on the uncertain Balkan front, will disappear in Austrian territory. The Allied occupying forces which, in view of their small numbers, have more of a moral than a real value, but which are still significant since they block routes from the East through the Alpine system, will be gone. Communications between the two sectors for troop movements and logistical transport will be severed.

When applying the treaty, adjustments will therefore have to be made to the current provisions, and plans will have to be revised. To some extent and within certain limits, the current conception of the defence of the Alpine area will have to be replaced by a new concept. Whatever fate may be imagined for Austrian territory if war were to break out, i.e. whether it remains inviolate or is overrun by the opposing armies, the strategic plans will have to take account of the vacuum between Central and Southern Europe that the peace treaty has introduced. This vacuum, at least potentially, excludes the Alpine area from the major theatre of operations of Western Europe. It should be borne in mind, however, that the area has lost considerable importance in the present strategy, since it is inconceivable for large numbers of armed forces to be channelled through long, rugged mountain corridors, highly vulnerable to air attack, on terrain on which motorised forces cannot be used.

The defence that the Atlantic Command once provided at the heart of the Alpine system will therefore have to be moved outside neutral territory. Geography offers some precise suggestions here: to the north it will be based on the Bavarian plateau, to the south on the Julian Alps range, and both will become the internal wing supports for the two sectors mentioned above, Central and Southern Europe. Italy will thus have a more important role to play in the European defence system, because military responsibility for the integrity of the Julian Alps region, although now politically divided by an absurd border, will ultimately fall to our country.

At the eastern end of the unbroken border between Italy and Austria, a short distance from Mount Forno where the frontiers of three States — Austria, Yugoslavia and Italy — converge, the Tarvisio pass opens out, one of the most important and most treacherous gateways into Italian territory. Two major communication routes meet at Tarvisio, served by excellent carriage roads and railways. One is Austrian, coming from the Klagenfurt basin, the other Yugoslavian, starting from the Ljubljana basin, both constituting ideal military terrain to which considerable value continues to be attached in modern strategy. From Tarvisio, the communication line runs to Udine and then leads into the Friulian plain, behind the positions on the Isonzo.

Blocking the Tarvisio pass is an absolute imperative for the defence of Italian soil and is certainly not beyond our armed forces and military capability. After the Allied troops, in common with the Soviets, have vacated Austrian territory, we will be able to rely to some extent on the area's impassability as a result of its

neutral status. It is very evident, however, that we must nonetheless take all the necessary defence measures that are also imposed by the existence of the other potential invasion route that could be used: an aggressor could, for example, respect Austrian independence but sweep through Hungary into Yugoslavian territory, and from there continue the offensive march with the Po Valley as its objective. Nor does all this take account of the consequences of the new agreement that is in preparation between Moscow and Belgrade.

The military problems raised by the re-establishment of the Republic of Austria's former neutrality have been touched on above. These problems are not difficult to solve and, above all, do not require substantial modifications to European defence. The two sectors will no longer be interconnected, but this will not weaken the Allied strategic organisation, which may well be more realistic, since it will be freed from the rather rigid conception of a continuous defence line running from Norway to Anatolia, as well as from unpredictable resistance operations and manoeuvres in the heart of the very harsh Alpine mountain complex. Nor will there be any changes in the tasks and commitments of Italy, which, following its detachment from the Central European sector, will become the primary and paramount stronghold of the Southern sector. Our armed forces will have to continue with their silent, resolute and conscientious preparations, on the basis of the plans and directives that have already been drawn up.

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