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The development of US-Czech cooperation within the constraints of the EU's foreign policy framework

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*U.S.-Czech Security and Defense Cooperation: History and
Prospects for the Future*



Research Report

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I. INTRODUCTION

With the United States and the Czech Republic set to officially begin bilateral negotiations for the conclusion of a new defense and security agreement between the two countries, understanding the dynamics of the U.S.-Czech security relationship is important to crafting the future policy of the Czech Republic. Given the changing geopolitical and security environment in Europe caused by the 2022 invasion of Ukraine by Russia and the new security threats to Europe and to NATO, the relationship of Czech Republic with the United States is more important than ever.

In this paper, I will discuss the history of the U.S.-Czech security and defense relationship and provide a brief overview of the current state of the relationship. The first section of the paper will briefly discuss the cooperation and alliance between the U.S. and the Czech Republic. The second section will focus on the current Czech security and defense policies and highlight the role of the U.S.-Czech cooperation, both bilateral and multilateral, in those policies. Lastly, I will evaluate the new security landscape in Europe created by the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine and make policy recommendations on how the U.S.-Czech relationship and cooperation in security and defense matters can be further strengthened to contribute to Euro-Atlantic collective security.

II. U.S.-Czech Security Relations: A Historical Overview

The relationship between the United States and the Czech Republic is fundamentally rooted in shared ideals and values. The relationship, in fact, goes back to the early 20th century when the U.S. President Woodrow Wilson and the founding father and first president of Czechoslovakia Tomáš Masaryk pledged to be allies in the cause of democracy.¹ The warm relationship between the two countries, that began officially with the 1918 recognition of the Czechoslovak independence by

¹ U.S. Embassy in the Czech Republic. (2020, September 3). Policy & History. <https://cz.usembassy.gov/our-relationship/policy-history/>

Wilson, was in large part the result of the personal work and commitment to democracy and human rights by President Masaryk himself.

U.S. interest and involvement in the region and in the country increased at the end of the Cold War. In November 1989, the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia brought to an end four decades of Soviet-dominated Communist rule, starting the democratization of the country. After the Velvet Revolution and the “Velvet Divorce” when the Czech Republic became independent, the country’s principal foreign policy goal became to join Western institutions and integrate into the Western security architecture in Europe. Czechoslovakia was among the most advanced of Central and Eastern European countries in terms of implementing domestic reforms, and after the Czech Republic separated from Slovakia in 1993, the country began to advocate passionately for accession to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). After U.S. President Bill Clinton took office, discussions regarding the enlargement of the U.S.-led NATO alliance to consolidate the new market-oriented liberal democracies of Central and Eastern Europe within the existing Western security framework took shape.²

The U.S.-Czech security and defense relationship following the end of the Cold War has largely been defined by the participation of the two countries in multilateral institutions, first and foremost NATO, but also other organizations such as OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe). Before becoming a full-fledged member of NATO, the Czech Republic participated in NATO’s Partnership for Peace (PfP) program which created strong bilateral links between Czechia and NATO established through joint exercises and deepened cooperation.³ During this time, the Czech Republic continued to implement the domestic reforms necessary to satisfy the criteria of NATO membership. These reforms were especially important to make the Czech armed forces compatible with the NATO structure and reform the Communist-era military, including importantly establishing civilian control of the armed forces. Before the Czech republic officially joined NATO in 1999, along

² James Goldgeier, and Joshua R. Itzkowitz Shiffrin. “Evaluating NATO Enlargement: Scholarly Debates, Policy Implications, and Roads Not Taken.” *International Politics* 57, no. 3 (2020): 291–321. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41311-020-00243-7>.

³ Fact Sheet: NATO Partnership for Peace (6/19/97). (2009). Online Archives of U.S. Department of State. https://1997-2001.state.gov/regions/eur/nato_fs-pfp.html

with Poland and Hungary, the country received substantial support and aid from the United States, as the leading member and initiator of NATO enlargement, to prepare the country for membership in NATO.

While the cooperation in the defense and security areas between the U.S. and the Czech Republic is mainly based on the security alliance between the countries through NATO, the countries also have a bilateral relationship outside the NATO framework. The Czech Republic has contributed to the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) since 2002 helping the United States in its efforts in Afghanistan. The countries also have a history of mutually beneficial ballistic missile defense cooperation and came close to the establishment of a U.S. ballistic missile defense center in the territory of the Czech Republic in late 2000s.⁴ Although these negotiations fluctuated over time and the Czech government eventually declined to host an early warning center in 2011 (after the Obama administration changed course and declined to place an X-radar station in the Czech territory), the history of these negotiations highlights an important area of substantial bilateral cooperation for the future, especially given the new security landscape in Europe after the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

III. Czech Foreign and Security Policy

As a small state in Central Europe, the Czech Republic seeks to maintain active participation in multilateral institutions (UN, EU, NATO, OSCE, etc.) in order to conduct its foreign policy. As an EU member country, the Czech foreign policy is largely aligned with the policies of the European Union. According to the concept of the Czech foreign policy, “The values underlying Czech foreign policy are entirely consistent with the principles and objectives promoted by the EU in its external relations: democracy, rule of law, universality, indivisibility of human rights, respect for human dignity, equality and solidarity, and respect for the principles of the United Nations Charter and

⁴ Michaela Dodge (2020) “U.S.-Czech ballistic missile defense cooperation: Lessons learned and way forward for others,” *Comparative Strategy*, 39:3, 288-298, DOI: 10.1080/01495933.2020.1740573

international law.” Czechia has warm relations with its neighboring countries which are all EU member countries. After the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine, the Czech Republic, along with the U.S. and EU, has placed sanctions on Russia and has assisted Ukraine militarily which has further deteriorated the relationship with a country that used to exert substantial influence in this region.⁵

According to the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “The Security Policy is based on a set of key national objectives and tools that safeguard the Czech Republic’s sovereignty, territorial integrity and preservation of all constituent elements of the democratic rule of law, functioning of democratic institutions, economic and social development of the state, protection of the lives, health and property of its citizens, protection of cultural assets, the environment and compliance with international security commitments.” Undoubtedly, the country’s membership in NATO, which provides the collective security guarantees of Article V in case of an armed attack on the Czech Republic, and in the European Union form the bedrock of the Czech security policy.

This fact is reflected in the 2019 National Security Strategy of the Czech Republic which provides the long-term defense strategy of the country.⁶ The document clearly highlights the importance of the Article V guarantees of NATO which, based on the Czech security policy, is the first and foremost guarantor of the country’s sovereignty, territorial integrity, and political independence. In this context, the alliance with the United States, which provides a nuclear umbrella⁷ and a formal commitment to protect its European allies through NATO, is especially important for the Czech Republic.

The Czech government has gradually revised and adapted its security and defense policy since the changes in the European geopolitical landscape that began ardenly in 2014 with the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. These changes have included, among others a commitment to increase the country’s defense spending to reach the 2% of GDP threshold set by NATO as well as an increase in the number of Czech troops and their readiness to respond to crises and an armed attack. Such changes

⁵ Reuters. (2022, February 25). Czechs ban Russian airlines, government mulls more sanctions.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/czechs-ban-russian-airlines-government-mulls-more-sanctions-2022-02-25/>

⁶ Ministry of Defense of the Czech Republic. (2019). THE LONG TERM PERSPECTIVE FOR DEFENCE 2035.

<https://www.army.cz/assets/en/ministry-of-defence/basic-documents/dv-2035-aj.pdf>

⁷<https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/1822953/us-nuclear-umbrella-extends-to-allies-partners-defense-official-says/>

are in line with the steps NATO members decided to take after the 2014 Wales Summit in light of the deteriorating security situation in Europe and the increased risk of security threats to NATO member states from the East.⁸

While the threat of an armed attack on the sovereign territory of the Czech Republic itself remains low at this time, given the country's location and the current development of Russia's war in Ukraine, the Czech Republic does face increasing security risks, including most importantly in cyberspace. In 2018, the Czech security service reported that the cyber attacks on the Foreign Ministry were organized by the Russian government.⁹ Czech websites were targeted again more recently after Russia invaded Ukraine,¹⁰ further showing the need for a new comprehensive strategy and concrete steps to ensure security in cyberspace. This is especially important given the vulnerability of critical infrastructure to cyber attacks. In 2021, the Czech government published its National Strategy for Countering Hybrid Interference which emphasizes the indivisibility of the Czech security from Euro-Atlantic security in general and which sets out a fresh agenda for the Czech government to increase the government's and society's resilience to overt and covert actions aimed at destabilization, including cyberthreats.

IV. Policy Recommendations for a Deeper Cooperation between the U.S. and the Czech Republic

On February 24, 2022, Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine, taking the conflict that began in 2014 with the annexation of Crimea and the separatist war in Eastern Ukraine to a new level.¹¹ An unprecedented attack on a sovereign state in Europe and the most destructive war in the

⁸ Czech Republic and NATO. (2016). | Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic.

https://www.mzv.cz/jnp/en/foreign_relations/security_policy/czech_republic_and_nato_1/index.html

⁹ Hovet, J. (2018, December 3). Czech Security Service Says Russia Behind Cyber Attacks on Ministry.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-czech-security-russia/czech-security-service-says-russia-behind-cyber-attacks-on-ministry-idUSKBN1O21BN>

¹⁰ Expats.cz (Howlings, s.r.o.). (2022, April 21). Russian hackers target Czech websites in a series of cyberattacks.

<https://www.expats.cz/czech-news/article/pro-russian-hackers-target-czech-websites-in-a-series-of-attacks>

¹¹ Team, B. T. V. J. (2022, May 20). Ukraine war in maps: Tracking the Russian invasion. BBC News.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-60506682>

continent since WWII, Russia's invasion of Ukraine has completely changed the security landscape in Europe and highlighted the importance of NATO in preserving stability and peace in the rest of Europe. However, the violation of an important international norm and Russia's open challenge to NATO and the collective West, which is supporting Ukraine militarily and economically, underscores the possibility of escalation. As such, exploring ways to further deepen the security partnership between the U.S. and the Czech republic, both within and outside the NATO alliance, is as important as it has ever been. If the peacetime accession of the country to NATO was a preventive measure aimed at sealing the country's democratization and ensuring stability in Central and Eastern Europe, more dramatic steps are currently warranted to address the real security challenges of a new era. Based on an assessment of the current situation, the U.S. and Czech policies, and the current state of the relationship, the following policies can help increase the security of both countries and the Euro-Atlantic community in general.

A. U.S.-Czech Bilateral Defense and Security Treaty

The United States and the Czech Republic have already announced the start of negotiations on a new bilateral defense deal which will codify the existing military to military cooperation and will build on the provisions of the NATO Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA).¹² The conclusion of a bilateral defense agreement will undoubtedly serve both American and Czech security interests. However, even under this new agreement, no permanent stationing of U.S. troops would be allowed on Czech territory.¹³ While before the 2022 invasion of Ukraine, no permanent stationing of U.S. troops was strategically vital for the Czech Republic, it is clear that more American military involvement will be needed in the near future to reinforce NATO's position vis-a-vis Russia, especially in Central and Eastern Europe. The Czech government should seriously consider hosting a small contingent of American troops on the Czech territory to send a strong message and increase the readiness of NATO to respond to any immediate security threats in the region. Hosting foreign troops is an established method of deterrence in what is known as a "tripwire force," which is aimed at

¹² Opening of U.S.-Czech Republic Defense Cooperation Agreement Negotiations. (2022, April 21). United States Department of State. <https://www.state.gov/opening-of-u-s-czech-republic-defense-cooperation-agreement-negotiations/>

¹³

signaling the defending side's commitment to respond militarily if an attack is launched.¹⁴ Hosting a permanent American base would also significantly bolster practical, military-to-military cooperation between U.S. and Czech Armed Forces on the ground. Including the permanent hosting of U.S. troops in the Czech Republic could be an integral component of a bilateral defense deal and would move the U.S.-Czech security relationship to a new level.

Besides hosting U.S. troops, these negotiations should also include a plan to modernize and rearm the Czech armed forces in order to boost NATO's overall military strength and deterrence strategy. The Czech military still largely uses weaponry and equipment dating back to the Communist era.¹⁵ The Czech Republic could use the negotiations for a defense treaty to obtain more modern, advanced equipment from the U.S. A rearmament effort, at this time, seems necessary to boost the military capabilities of the Czech armed forces. Expanding arms sales from the U.S. to the Czech Republic provides both an economic, and a strategic incentive for both countries to conclude such a deal.

Lastly and more importantly, the U.S. and the Czech Republic should start immediate negotiations over stationing a U.S. missile defense station on the Czech territory, preferably a TPY-2 radar capable of detecting and defending against a ballistic missile attack. While previously, the countries were unable to reach a deal to place a ballistic defense detecting station in the Czech Republic (not least because of differing views of against which country's possible attack the station would protect and the desire of the Obama administration to reset the relationship with Russia), the clear risks to European security make the deployment of such a system in the heart of Europe necessary. This is especially important as Russia moves more sophisticated missile systems, including nuclear-capable, closer to NATO borders (of particular concern are the Russian deployments in the

¹⁴ Czech Republic - Defense. (2022). International Trade Administration | Trade.Gov.

<https://www.trade.gov/country-commercial-guides/czech-republic-defense>Mazarr, M. (2018). Understanding Deterrence. The RAND Corporation.

https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/perspectives/PE200/PE295/RAND_PE295.pdf

¹⁵ Czech Republic - Defense. (2022). International Trade Administration | Trade.Gov.

<https://www.trade.gov/country-commercial-guides/czech-republic-defense>

exclave of Kaliningrad).¹⁶ Taking this step would not only significantly improve the security of the Czech Republic itself and serve U.S. national security interests, but would enhance NATO's deterrence and defense strategies accordingly.

The signing of a bilateral defense and security treaty that would include all three of above-mentioned policy proposals would be a huge step in deepening and elevating the U.S.-Czech security relationship to a qualitatively new level.

B. Establishing a Joint U.S.-Czech Cyber Defense Task Force

As already mentioned, cyberthreats and hybrid interference now pose a significant risk to both the United States and to the Czech Republic. With a history of Russian cyberattacks in both countries, both states have a huge unrealized potential of cooperating in this area. Given the advanced cyber capabilities of the United States, the U.S. could share its expertise with the Czech government through agency to agency links and developing relationships. Launching programs to enhance intelligence sharing and cooperation on cybersecurity between the intelligence agencies of both countries would also be very beneficial. Given the unique nature of cyberthreats, establishing a permanent body that would be composed of government officials and cybersecurity agents could accomplish three important goals of the U.S.-Czech cybersecurity cooperation:

- Formalize and institutionalize the cooperation in the cyberspace by creating a permanent task force;
- Train and prepare experts, officials, and cybersecurity agents from both governments as an adequate preventive and preparatory measure to ensure cybersecurity;
- Address urgent and non-urgent cyberthreats to the U.S. and the Czech Republic in a cooperative manner increasing the effectiveness of security measures, threat assessment, and threat response.

C. Supporting European Strategic Autonomy in Defense

The concept of “European Strategic Autonomy,” which has gained traction in recent years, has been debated quite fervently in European policy circles. Despite being embraced and touted by leaders

¹⁶ Deutsche Welle (www.dw.com). (2018, February 7). Russia claims right to deploy Kaliningrad missiles. DW.COM. <https://www.dw.com/en/russia-deploys-nuclear-capable-missile-system-in-kaliningrad-reports/a-42474925>

such as France's Emmanuel Macron and high-level EU officials, few concrete steps have been taken to realize a vision according to which Europe will be increasingly independent and in charge of its own affairs, without what is sometimes perceived as "diktat" from the United States. This concern is especially applicable to the defense and security of Europe which is considered the weakest area and the most crucial for the concept of European Strategic Autonomy.¹⁷ In the past, several attempts have been made to assert such strategic autonomy, especially by creating security mechanisms outside the U.S.-led NATO framework. However, such attempts have always provoked serious concerns and outcry in the United States which has sought to minimize risks to a NATO-based security order in Europe.¹⁸

As a reliable NATO ally and a partner of the United States with previous experience advocating its policy priorities with Washington circles (such as the bid for NATO membership), the Czech government should try to use public diplomacy and its private diplomatic channels to change perceptions and attitudes regarding European Strategic Autonomy in defense and security in Washington. Enlisting the U.S. support for a greater responsibility in its security affairs for Europe while preserving the vitality of NATO is crucial to ensure that efforts to pursue strategic autonomy will not be hindered by the U.S. government. Such a campaign should emphasize the following points and be aimed at influencing the decision-making process of U.S. policymakers:

- The changing dynamics of world politics and the geopolitical situation in Eurasia, as well as the shifting priorities of U.S. foreign policy, demand that European countries assert greater responsibility for their security affairs;
- European strategic autonomy and NATO's role in preserving stability and peace in Europe are not mutually exclusive as an institutionalized partnership between European institutions and NATO is crucial to the security of Euro-Atlantic region;

¹⁷ Clingendael Netherlands Institute of International Relations. (2020, December). European Strategic Autonomy in Security and Defence.

https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/2020-12/Report_European_Strategic_Autonomy_December_2020.pdf

¹⁸ Laurien Crump, "The Real Risk to NATO Is CSCE': The Role of NATO at the End of the Cold War." *Atlantisch Perspectief* 43, no. 2 (2019): 21–25. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48581481>.

- U.S. support for European strategic autonomy will shift the burden for the costs of providing security to European allies while still maintaining a strong transatlantic relationship, something that Washington has wanted persistently.

These policy proposals provide several concrete and effective opportunities for the United States and the Czech Republic to increase the level of cooperation as allies in security and defense matters. Russia's attack on Ukraine and the real threat to the stability on the continent today demand that the U.S.-Czech security relationship be further strengthened more than ever and the above-mentioned policies are poised to make a significant difference.