4 The Czech Republic

A SMALL CONTRIBUTOR OR A "FREE RIDER"?

THOMAS S. SZAYNA

The Czech Republic's entry into NATO marks an important threshold in the country's postcommunist "transition." If the end point of the postcommunist transition is defined as (1) the erasing of the legacy of Soviet-led forced detachment and communist autarkic estrangement of the country from its neighbors in Europe, (2) the setting in place of institutional means for the growth and prosperity of the Czech Republic within an increasingly unified community of democratic European states, and (3) the restoring of an international context for the Czech Republic in line with what has been "normal" for a millennium, then the incorporation of the Czech Republic into the dominant security organization in Europe amounts a milestone in the process. Although it will take decades for Czech prosperity to regain its pre–World War II parity with that of Austria or Bavaria, Czech entry into NATO accelerates the pace of the catching up, for it solidifies the irreversibility of the transition process and strengthens the country's candidacy for early European Union (EU) membership.

The lengthy road still left in order to erase the legacy of Soviet domination need not obfuscate the tremendous progress the Czech Republic has made so far. Indeed, the magnitude of the Czech transition can be seen in the sweeping changes of the 1990s. The Czech lands have moved from being a dominant component of the neo-Stalinist sham federal state of Czechoslovakia in 1989 to being a largely national Czech state and a functioning democracy. In terms of the depth of changes in the country's identity, the scope of the Czech transition exceeds that of the other two new NATO members, Poland and Hungary. Whereas all three countries went through the fundamental shocks of the end of communist regimes and their replacement by experiments in democratic political systems

and free market economies, the lands currently forming the Czech Republic also went through a second fundamental shock, that of the Czechoslovak state's falling apart under the strains of the transition from communism just three years after the hard-line communists were ousted from power. Thus, besides the shock of the end of communism, the Czechs and the Slovaks also experienced a shock akin to those that befell the USSR and Yugoslavia (although without the strife that accompanied the breakup of the other two "federal" communist states).

The two successor states that emerged from Czechoslovakia, the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic, diverged substantially in the paths their political transitions took soon after their split-up at the beginning of 1993. Whereas the breakup strengthened Czech efforts to join the dominant European security and economic institutions, similar tendencies weakened in Slovakia. Undoubtedly, Czechs had dominated Czechoslovakia, Prague housed the machinery of the federal state, and the transition to a Czech state faced fewer difficulties and proved less traumatic than the comparable transition in Slovakia, where some institutions truly had to emerge from scratch. But the fact remains that, as a new state, the Czech Republic has faced accession to NATO while grappling with establishing its own identity in contemporary, increasingly unified Europe.

After the ouster of communists from power, Czechoslovak policy had to adjust to dealing with security in terms of a newly sovereign federal state outside of an alliance framework. Then, upon the breakup of the country, the Czech security establishment had to consider security in terms of a smaller national state still outside of an alliance framework. Since 1997, Czech security experts have had to readjust their thinking again, away from national terms and toward planning as part of a genuine collective defense organization and a democratic security community. Since the Czech Republic gained independence, a sense of unreality has surrounded Czech defense planning, because the state has faced no military threats and it borders on neighbors with whom a military conflict seems unthinkable. The situation is different from that in Poland or Hungary, where instability in the former USSR (Belarus, Ukraine, and Russia) and the wars of the Yugoslav succession, respectively, have driven home

the idea that conflicts have not ended and security has not been automatically assured despite the end of the Cold War.

For a variety of reasons, issues of safeguarding the security of the Czech state, outlining a defense strategy, and reorganizing the armed forces proved difficult for the Czechs and remained unresolved up until the invitation to join NATO in May 1997. Although Czech security and defense experts drew up blueprints of Czech security policy, the successive Czech governments have delayed adopting them formally. Similarly, Czech military planners have gone far in making the Czech armed forces more compatible with NATO's, but they have proceeded sometimes in an ad hoc fashion and without clear guidance and prioritization provided by the government. At the beginning of 1999, on the verge of Czech entry into NATO, aspects of security policy and defense strategy remained unresolved or only partially solved because of a series of weak governments and limited interest in security issues among political circles and the electorate in the Czech Republic.

In this chapter I attempt to explain some of the problems that have affected Czech thinking about defense and security. I begin with a discussion of the Czech defense establishment's assumptions about security, go over the Czech leadership's security policies, touch on the peculiar but widespread negative image of the military in the Czech Republic, and then trace the reform of the Czech armed forces. I conclude with a discussion of the role the country might play in NATO and the military contribution it might make to the organization.

Basic Czech Assumptions about Security

Although the Czech security and defense establishment on several occasions presented its vision of Czech national interests, potential threats to the country, and policies designed to deal with the threats, the Czech government repeatedly delayed its approval of a basic outline of national security and military strategy of the republic. A defense "white paper" was finally published on 17 February 1999—just a month before the country's scheduled formal membership in NATO. It presented official Czech views on security, outlined a state defense policy, and put together a set of guidelines for the military. The delay in issuing the Czech white paper on

defense was peculiar and stood in contrast to the situation in Poland and Hungary.

The delay, however, meant neither the existence of deep cleavages within Czech society about the country's security orientation nor the absence of a consistent Czech policy of integration into Euro-Atlantic and European structures since the country's independence. Instead, the recognition of a benign security environment, a focus on economic transformation, and the low salience of security issues in the Czech Republic provide the most important reasons for the delays in tackling a basic security document. As has been borne out in public opinion surveys, the Czech electorate sees security in terms of the absence of a threat,[1] and in post–Cold War Europe, the geographical location of the Czech Republic makes the country highly unlikely to be threatened militarily. Since most Czechs seem to take security from external aggression pretty much for granted, membership in a military alliance has not generated any great enthusiasm or urgency among either the Czech population or the Czech political leadership.[2] In view of this sentiment, why have the successive Czech governments sought NATO membership?

The Institute of International Relations (IIR), an advisory body to the Czech Foreign Ministry, produced an elaboration of Czech national interests in 1993 and then, in 1997, its own version of a Czech security policy.[3] The two documents together amount to the most comprehensive, if not fully authoritative, Czech statements explaining the underpinnings of Czech security and defense policies, and the defense establishment has treated the two documents as de facto outlines of Czech policy.[4]

As the IIR's statement on security policy points out, establishing and sustaining a democratic political system and a functioning market economy are the fundamental goals of any Czech government. Such goals cannot be seen separately from the integration of the country into a larger, democratic, market-based European community. Moreover, as the IIR statement makes clear, the Czech Republic must play an active role in the further construction of such a community.[5] Since the EU and NATO form the two most important elements that allow for the development of such a community, in IIR's view Czech membership in both organizations emerges as crucial in securing the most basic goals and aspirations of

Czech society. Even in the absence of an authoritative Czech white paper on defense, it remains clear that all Czech governments since independence have subscribed to such a vision of basic principles underpinning Czech security policy. Scarcely a week has gone by since 1993 without some high Czech official's commenting that membership in NATO and entry into the EU constitute the two basic foreign policy goals of the Czech Republic. The goals are often couched in terms of a "return to Europe" or of "undoing past injustices." While not disputing the political and emotional significance of such claims, a more analytical perspective on Czech aspirations of EU and NATO membership focuses more on the gains that would accrue to the Czech state from such membership.

Since independence, every Czech (and post-1989 Czechoslovak) government has viewed integration of the country into the EU as the best way to secure its newly gained sovereignty and ensure its long-term prosperity and democratic development. From a rationalist perspective, in simple economic terms EU membership would make the country more competitive in the world economy, and the Czech Republic would obtain an abundance of aid and support from the EU to transform its economy effectively. And becoming part of an increasingly unified (politically and economically) European community, the Czech Republic would join the most affluent and powerful group of states in the world, thereby safeguarding its security for the foreseeable future.

A focus on the economic aspects of security has not been limited to the liberal economists who have played a dominant role in steering the country for the first five years after independence. Even some of the highest-ranking Czech military figures have argued that the economic security of the Czech Republic and its entry into the EU are just as important for the country's security as Czech military potential, if not more so.[6] Opinion polls have shown consistently that a majority of Czechs favor joining the EU as a full member in the shortest possible time.[7] Indeed, the Czech electorate sees EU membership as the standard by which to judge the success of the Czech transition away from communism and as a milestone in undoing the effects of communism upon the country (and the support stems from the economic as well as the emotional perspective of "rejoining Europe"). The strong popular support for EU membership stands in contrast to the substantially weaker support for NATO membership.[8]

The legacies of the communist system and the wide disparities in wealth and level of economic development between the Czech Republic and the affluent core of the EU have meant that the Czech Republic would not join the EU overnight. The EU's preoccupation with strengthening the ties among its existing members and those members' fears about admitting into their organization a country with a much weaker economy, as well as the range of economic, legal, and political adjustments needed to make the Czech Republic compatible with the EU, have delayed the country's likely entry into the EU until well into the first decade of the twenty-first century.[9] Such delays have complicated the Czechs' fundamental objective of "rejoining Europe" and have made it necessary to safeguard the country's transition during the stage of preparation for EU membership and accession negotiations with the EU. Several Czech security goals stem from such basic considerations: (1) ensuring that European integration does not unravel and that Germany remains firmly integrated in European structures; (2) preventing any possibility of Russia's imposing control over the Czech Republic or even thwarting its integration process; and (3) preventing regional problems from escalating to more serious security threats. All of these goals serve to keep the Czech drive to join the EU on track.

As the single most powerful state in Europe, Germany presents a potential security worry for most Europeans. The German "problem" seems to have been solved by making Germany unable to use its considerable power unilaterally and instead defining its security in terms of an integrated Europe. Czech views of the necessity of keeping Germany integrated do not differ greatly from the dominant views throughout Europe, though they have a special quality because of the history of Czech-German relations in the twentieth century and the proximity of the Czech Republic to Germany. The preferred Czech solution to the "German problem" emphasizes the continued vitality of NATO, for the alliance makes US involvement in European security affairs automatic and guarantees that Germany remains integrated in wider security structures. US leadership retains a crucial role for the foreseeable future, for no European state could play the role the United States does.[10] A European security pillar presents a reasonable option in the more distant future, but the Czech security establishment does not want to see plans for a European

security pillar lead to the downgrading of US involvement in Europe any time soon.

Czech security experts recognize Germany's crucial role for the Czech Republic: "Germany was and always will remain the most important neighbor of the Czech nation."[11] Accordingly, they also see Germany's role in Europe as the most important security consideration for the Czech Republic. From such a perspective, NATO's persistence and Czech membership in NATO form the most important security goals of the Czech Republic. Put in different terms, the integration of the Czech Republic into a greater European security community (of which Germany is a member) holds out the possibility of transcending a persistent twentieth-century problem for the Czechs—that of being a "buffer state" between two large and sometimes aggressive powers (the USSR/Russia and Germany). Last but not least, Czech and German membership in the same alliance holds out the prospect of putting Czech-German relations on the same "normal" level as Dutch-German relations and finally putting the legacy of World War II to rest.[12]

Russia, as the main successor state to the former hegemon over central Europe in general—and the Czech Republic specifically—remains a hypothetical threat to the Czech Republic. If some of the elements unreconciled to the loss of Russia's superpower status came to power in Russia, they might conceivably launch an attempt to bring some of the former Soviet republics and perhaps even some of the former satellite states into a Russian sphere of influence. Increasingly, such a scenario seems farfetched, and Czech security experts treat it as such, but it remains plausible. The more likely effect of a Russian resurgence entails renewed confrontation in Europe and disruptions in the transformation and integration of the former communist states into the EU.[13] Czech membership in NATO would deter any hypothetical Russian expansionist designs on the country and would limit the level of any disruptions upon the country in case of Russian resurgence.

In Czech thinking, the potential threats from both Germany and Russia seem unlikely to materialize. If they were to do so, however, they would endanger the sovereignty of the Czech Republic fundamentally. In other words, such threats have a low probability but entail high potential cost. Regional, border, or internal conflicts seem much more likely as security

threats to the Czech Republic in the foreseeable future.[14] But although such threats have a higher probability than does a fundamental challenge to Czech sovereignty, they would entail a lower cost to the Czech Republic if they were to materialize. Such threats also seem more likely in the unintegrated portions of Europe, primarily in the Balkans and the Soviet successor states, than in the immediate vicinity of the Czech Republic. The Czech security establishment sees a transformed NATO that deals effectively with such conflicts (deterring them and preventing their escalation) as being in the Czech interest. Since three of the Czech Republic's immediate neighbors (Germany, Austria, and Poland) are members of, or will shortly join, European security and economic institutions to which the Czech Republic aspires, a border war with Slovakia presents the only direct potential threat to the Czech Republic in the second category of threats. Although hypothetically plausible, the Czech security establishment sees such a threat as extremely unlikely, for no border or minority problems encumber relations between the two countries. Under Mečiar's tenure in Slovakia, however, the scenario became more plausible in terms of a resurgent Russia's using Slovakia to disrupt the former Soviet satellites, including the Czech Republic.[15]

According to Czech security experts, "soft" security problems such as organized crime, waves of refugees, and terrorism will form the most likely security threats in Europe for the foreseeable future, especially as they pertain to the Czech Republic and other states engaged in transforming their societies and economies away from communism. Such problems may affect the Czech Republic as a result of internal instability and unrest in the unintegrated portions of Europe. These threats have a high likelihood but would entail fairly low costs for the Czech Republic—primarily greater pressures on the state budget as a result of increased spending on police and housing for refugees, or as a result of delays in the economic transformation caused by the driving away of investors due to perceptions of increased risk. Although low in comparison with the costs of "hard" security threats, such costs might still become substantial when seen from the perspective of opportunity costs and delays in Czech integration into the EU.[16] Military means have secondary value in dealing with "soft" security problems, but such threats do make even more important the existence of an effective security organization that

can provide expertise and material assistance to counter them. From such an angle, Czech integration into NATO and the EU will lead to a stronger state that can deal more effectively with "soft" security problems.

All of the security threats, from the highly unlikely fundamental problems to the more mundane and likely, have the common thread of highlighting the role of NATO in ensuring that Czech integration into the EU does not become sidetracked and in making sure that small states in Europe do not fall victim to aggression by the powerful (a pattern with a long history in Europe and one that the Czechs have experienced on a number of occasions in the twentieth century). NATO plays a role in maintaining a security environment in which the EU can continue to develop, and it deters or limits the manner in which a variety of security threats can affect the Czech Republic. But Czech membership in the alliance has the potential to enhance the country's role in shaping the security environment.

Although Czech officials agree in principle to the overall security goals outlined above, and although draft security documents prepared in the mid-1990s by the various Czech governments reflect the themes contained in the two IIR documents, successive Czech governments have paid limited attention to security and defense issues. The low level of interest in security issues has the potential to delay Czech integration into NATO and to make NATO's security guarantees more difficult to implement if the security environment were somehow to change for the worse. The next section provides an outline of Czech foreign and defense policies since the emergence of a sovereign Czech state.

Main Trends in Czech Security Policy

As a general rule, foreign and defense policies, including the identification of security threats, the importance attached to them, and policies designed to address them, stem from the domestic orientations of the ruling coalition in the given country. The Czech Republic fits the rule.

The Initial Postcommunist Period

The Czechoslovak "Velvet Revolution" took the form of a sudden rupture in November 1989. Within six weeks, former dissidents ousted and

replaced the hard-line communists associated with the Soviet intervention in 1968. The most famous dissident, the playwright Václav Havel, became president of the country in January 1990. The "founding elections" in June 1990 revealed overwhelming public support for systemic change, and the new government launched steps to replace the communist autarkic and authoritarian model with a market economy and a democratic political system. The integration of Czechoslovakia into western European international institutions (the EC, now the EU) formed the international component of the domestic transition away from communism.

In terms of security, Czechoslovak efforts to safeguard the transition concentrated initially on transforming the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE)—now the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)—into a pan-European security organization that would transcend Cold War divisions and alliances. As part of such a view, Czechoslovak foreign policy initially envisioned the dissolution of both NATO and the Warsaw Pact. Czechoslovak appreciation for NATO and its continued role grew steadily, however, advanced by residual concerns about the future evolution of a unified Germany, fears over the attempted coup in Moscow in August 1991, the violent breakup of Yugoslavia in mid-1991, and then the breakup of the USSR. The wars of Yugoslav succession especially put an end to the "romantic" stage in Czechoslovakia's foreign policy thinking by demonstrating vividly that, despite the end of the Cold War, security problems continued to exist, and any effective all-European security institution would take time to develop.

Because of the need for Western diplomatic, economic, and financial support to ensure the success of the Czechoslovak domestic transition, relations with the United States and western European countries (especially the immediate neighbors, Germany and Austria) went almost overnight from adversarial to close and friendly. Conversely, the new leadership implicitly identified the USSR as Czechoslovakia's main potential threat because of the possibility of the Soviets' attempting to reimpose a satellite status on the country and constrain its reformist path. So long as Soviet troops remained stationed in the country and the Warsaw Pact continued to exist, a Soviet attempt to roll back the regime existed as a real threat. Consequently, Czechoslovak leaders quickly negotiated a rapid withdrawal

of the Soviet troops stationed in the country (completed in mid-1991) and attempted first to curtail the ability of the Soviets to use the Warsaw Pact as a mechanism to deny full sovereignty to Czechoslovakia and then to end the pact altogether. After the breakup of the USSR in late 1991, the Czechoslovak security establishment identified Russia and Ukraine as sources of instability that could threaten Czechoslovakia's transformation.

Besides the complete shift in international orientation, the change of regimes also provided an opportunity for a change in relations with immediate neighbors. Driven by similar goals vis-à-vis the USSR, genuine cooperation and coordination of policies took place between Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Hungary. The cooperation built on earlier ties among the dissidents in the three countries, all of whom had assumed power. By 1991, the cooperation (spurred by Western encouragement) took on a formal nature, and the three countries became known as the Visegrád group (for the city in Hungary where the leaders of the three countries met and agreed to coordinate some of their policies).

The internal social strains of the transition away from communism exacerbated regionalist and nationalist tendencies in Czechoslovakia. The June 1992 elections led to a hopelessly deadlocked parliament—a civic-liberal and Christian-democratic coalition in favor of rapid market reforms emerged as the dominant political grouping in the Czech lands, while a populist-statist movement appealing to Slovak nationalism emerged as the dominant political grouping in Slovakia. Because of the rules concerning the passage of laws in the bicameral Czechoslovak parliament, the dominant Slovak and Czech groupings could each block any measure proposed by the other side. Recognizing the impasse and the futility of further debate, the two sides agreed to dissolve the federation and set up two independent successor states, even though a majority of Czechs and Slovaks favored a continued common state. During the later half of 1992, Czech and Slovak representatives negotiated the breakup, and the two new states came into being officially on 1 January 1993.

The Klaus Era

The Czech assembly, elected in the June 1992 elections, became the national parliament of the new Czech Republic upon its birth. For almost

five years (from January 1993 until December 1997), a coalition of liberal, civic-democratic, and Christian-democratic parties formed a government led by Václav Klaus. Upon independence, Czech political institutions retained a great deal of continuity with former Czechoslovak structures. Havel became president of the new country, and the dominant pro-Western integrationist policy became even stronger. Even in terms of symbols, the Czech Republic represented the "true" successor state; for example, the Czechoslovak flag became the flag of the Czech Republic.

Upon independence, Czech foreign policy became a more radical variation of the earlier Czechoslovak policy. Klaus and his leadership previously had been uneasy with Slovak political trends and looked at Slovakia as unnecessary baggage that acted as a brake on Czech aspirations to become integrated into Western institutions. With the Slovak "baggage" discarded, Klaus felt free to implement the full range of policies needed for the Czech Republic to become integrated into Western institutions as soon as possible. Simple geography aided his goal. Upon independence, the Czech Republic became the westernmost of the former communist states in central Europe; more than half of its borders were shared with EU and NATO member Germany and soon-to-be EU member Austria. The Czech Republic also ceased to border any Soviet successor state. With the high level of development of the country and the successful reform measures in 1990–92, all the necessary factors seemed to be in place to push for a rapid Czech integration into Western international structures.

In a pattern similar to that of discarding the "baggage" that Slovakia represented, the Czech leadership downgraded regional cooperation in the Visegrád group (the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, and Hungary) in favor of a unilateral attempt to join the EU and NATO. The rationale for such a policy stemmed from the Czech leadership's perception of the Czech Republic as the front-runner in the race with neighbors to join the Western institutions. Linking Czech fate with that of the other three countries only delayed Czech integration. Similarly, in terms of ties with Slovakia, the Klaus government quickly proved that it treated Slovakia like any other neighboring country and allowed a monetary union between the Czech Republic and Slovakia to break down soon after the two countries separated.

The other Visegrád members and, for their own reasons, the EU and NATO greeted the Czech "defection" from regional cooperation with resentment. Both the EU and NATO acted to curtail the Czechs' unilateral approaches. As a result, Klaus outwardly modified the Czech policy line, though without abandoning the goal of being the first of the former communist countries to join the EU. The acceptance of the Czech Republic into the OECD in 1995 as the first of the former communist states and the EU's invitation to the Czech Republic to begin accession negotiations (as one of six new countries) in March 1998 has borne out the determined Czech push for integration. Showing confidence in free market approaches, the Czech leadership also pursued a policy of regional trade liberalization, both by acting as a catalyst in the formation of the Central European Free Trade Area (CEFTA, at first consisting of the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, and Hungary and later joined by Slovenia, Romania, and Bulgaria) and by negotiating a series of bilateral free trade agreements.

In the security sphere, the Czech Republic became physically more secure because of the increased distance between it and the former USSR. Whereas previously Czechoslovakia had bordered the former USSR (Ukraine), the Czech Republic became separated from Ukraine by Slovakia, and Russia became removed by two countries from the Czech Republic. In addition, because of the country's being geographically "wedged in" with the unified Germany, Czech planners could rely on substantial German assistance to deal with any hypothetical threat from Russia. Indeed, in view of the Czech Republic's lack of serious problems with any neighboring country, it became exceedingly difficult to come up with even hypothetical military threats.

Because of the perception of a benign security environment and a lack of military threats to the country, the Czech leadership initially did not lobby vigorously for membership in NATO. Prior to 1994, Czech officials certainly aimed for NATO membership but did not push the issue, because security concerns seemed secondary to them and they felt that a vigorous debate on NATO enlargement had the potential to cause problems in relations with Russia and unnecessarily worsen the security environment. However, after the alliance decided in late 1993 to enlarge

eastward, and once the discussions about enlargement moved to specifics, Czech officials openly campaigned for inclusion in the first round. The Czech Republic joined the Partnership for Peace (PFP) program shortly after the latter's announcement, and it participated extensively in PFP activities, especially with German and US armed forces. The participation has had a clear motive—preparation for and early entry into NATO. In order to contribute to collective security efforts in post–Cold War Europe (and to deal with the secondary security threats on the continent), as well as to assuage some fears in NATO about the Czech leadership's limited attention to defense issues, the Czech Republic has participated in peace operations at a substantial level. The Czechs stepped up their earlier (Czechoslovak) involvement in UN peacekeeping operations and have deployed an infantry battalion as part of the IFOR/SFOR operation in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

As the debate over the first round of invitations to NATO escalated in 1995–96, Czech-Polish ties in the security realm improved. The improvement made sense because Poland's importance in central Europe grew after the breakup of Czechoslovakia. The Czech leadership realized that, for geostrategic reasons, NATO saw Poland as the most important country among the aspiring new members, and close Czech-Polish security ties opened up the prospect of simultaneous Czech-Polish integration into NATO.

Czech concerns about Germany probably also played a role in the improvement in Czech-Polish relations.[17] Although Czech-German relations remained close and good, legacies of the past inserted irritants and kept delaying the signing of a German-Czech treaty. Problems arose because of the intertwining of domestic German politics with the issue of compensation to ethnic Germans expelled from Czechoslovakia (mostly from Czech lands) shortly after World War II. Many of the expellees settled in Bavaria, and they have had a substantial influence on Bavarian politics. The junior partner in Helmut Kohl's coalition (which governed until 1998), the Bavarian-based Christian-Social Union, relied on the vote of the expellees, and as a result, the constituency has had an inordinate impact on German foreign policy. Although the issue really boils down to a German domestic problem, it has had the effect of alienating

some Czechs and encouraging concerns about German designs. This, combined with the fact that much of the direct foreign investment into the Czech Republic since 1990 has come from Germany, has meant that residual fears among Czechs about the eventual nature of German influence over the Czech Republic have not disappeared. Both communist and extreme nationalist political forces in the Czech Republic have used fears of Germany to discredit the Klaus policy of integration. Ties with Austria have been free of major problems, though some irritants (including ones regarding expellees, similar to Czech-German irritants) have surfaced.

Czech relations with Slovakia have a special quality about them. On one hand, extensive and close ties remain between Czech and Slovak officials. On the other, postdivorce resentments and grudges have intruded into relations between the two states. Slovakia's uncertain political reform process (until the elections in the fall of 1998) raised a number of concerns in the Czech Republic. Most of all, Czech officials began to look upon Slovakia as a politically unstable and potentially threatening country (in the sense of causing refugee flows). One specific Czech concern revolved around the close ties between Russia and Slovakia and the potential Russian use of Slovakia as a tool to promote instability in central Europe. A clumsy Slovak attempt to create problems in Czech-Slovak relations shortly before NATO's May 1997 summit and thus to damage Czech entry into NATO provides one example of the pro-Moscow proclivities of the Mečiar leadership and his willingness to introduce irritants into Slovak-Czech ties. Another Czech concern stems from nationalistic policies in Slovakia and from Slovak-Hungarian friction. The Czech leadership has feared that tensions might escalate and cause a spillover of problems to the Czech Republic. Nonetheless, on the basis of extensive and continuing personal ties between individual Czech and Slovak politicians, administrators, and military officers, as well as disparities in power relations between the two countries, the Czech leadership views Slovakia as a problem but not as a military adversary. Czech officials treated the ouster of Mečiar from power in Slovakia with relief and even enthusiasm. All indications seem to point to close relations between the two countries for the foreseeable future, so long as liberal political forces remain in power in Slovakia.

Implicitly, Czech leadership has perceived Russia as an adversary because, most of all, Russian opposition to Czech membership in NATO has put an obstacle in front of a fundamental Czech foreign policy goal that underlies a whole range of the country's policies.[18] In addition, increasing signs of strength by communist and nationalist political forces in Russia raise the specter of renewed Russian attempts to expand its influence over central Europe. Finally, the uncertain political and economic situation in Russia and Ukraine has led to the proliferation of organized crime and drug smuggling rings that have established a strong presence in the Czech Republic. Dealing with such threats has become one of the foremost security problems for the Czech Republic.

Parliamentary elections in June 1996 weakened the Klaus-led coalition, and the government finally collapsed amid scandal, controversy, and internal bickering in December 1997.[19] The Klaus coalition, however, did steer the country successfully to the Madrid summit in July 1997 and managed to receive the invitation to join NATO. Had the Czech Republic not received an invitation at Madrid, the Klaus government probably would have fallen even sooner, not because of any great security concerns among the Czech electorate but because such a failure would have meant a symbolic stamp of disapproval by NATO regarding the pace of reforms in the Czech Republic. Had it happened, it would have slowed down the Czech drive to join the EU and relegated the Czech Republic to a "second tier" of countries emerging from communism.

Although successful in receiving the invitation to join NATO, the Klaus leadership had never paid great attention to security matters, and its activity in support of the NATO invitation had a forced feel about it. Befitting his own proclivities, Klaus seems to have perceived (probably correctly) that a vibrant economy and a strong currency provided the best ways to ensure security for a small country in contemporary Europe. But once NATO decided to enlarge, the Klaus government argued the Czech case sufficiently, despite widespread qualms in NATO about Czech military effectiveness.

After Klaus

A caretaker government of technocrats, led by Josef Tosovsky, succeeded Klaus for six months. Elections in June 1998 led to an impasse, because

neither of the dominant parties—the civic-democrats led by Klaus and the social-democrats led by Miloš Zeman—won an outright majority, and neither could easily form a governing coalition. In a novel arrangement between two political archenemies, Zeman formed a social-democrat minority government with Klaus's acquiescence. The arrangement seems unlikely to work for the four years stipulated, and another round of early elections seems likely. The opposition scored successes in elections for the Senate as well as in local elections in November 1998. It appears that political volatility will continue during the Czech Republic's initial period of integration into NATO.

All indications point to the social-democrats' perpetuating Klaus's earlier policy of devoting only limited attention to security and defense matters. The social-democrats share the overall goal of EU membership, but their views toward NATO membership seem lukewarm. In the early years of the NATO enlargement debate, the social-democrats opposed enlargement. Even after the Madrid invitation, they advocated a referendum on the issue. Because of their constituency, the social-democrats may pay even less attention to security and defense issues and devote more resources to ameliorating the social disruptions connected with the Czech transformation rather than to defense. The economic slowdown that has affected the Czech Republic since 1997 makes the turn toward even less emphasis on defense more likely.

The Image of the Military

The low esteem in which the armed forces are held in the Czech lands—something that is borne out in all public opinion polls—has deep historical roots and represents a peculiar Czech problem. The issue has greatly affected the political role that the Czech armed forces have played in the country, and it has probably contributed to the political leadership's limited interest in defense and security. Quite simply, in a democratic political system, politicians will deal with issues of most interest to the electorate. If security does not seem threatened and the military seems unimportant, politicians have few incentives to pay much attention to such issues.

The strong anti-military and even pacifist outlooks common to people

in the Czech lands have historical roots.[20] The last time the Bohemian (Czech) army fought a major battle in defense of its homeland was in 1620, during the Thirty Years War, when it suffered a crushing defeat at the Battle of White Mountain (Bílá Hora). Following the defeat, and the absorption of Bohemia and Moravia into the Hapsburg empire, the military became associated with foreign domination. The identification of German-speaking Austrians with the military during the rise of Czech nationalism in the nineteenth century strengthened the negative image of a soldier. The popular image of soldiers as bumbling fools also comes across in classic nineteenth-century Czech literature.

Despite the establishment of a Czechoslovak state in 1918, the Czechoslovak military never fought in its defense. Thus, the military could not point to any one "glorious fight" to form the core myth of its serving as the protector of state sovereignty. Indeed, the harnessing of the Czechoslovak military for Soviet ends and its participation in domestic crackdowns under the communist regime only strengthened the old negative images. The exploits of the Czechoslovak Legion during the Russian Civil War and the participation of a few Czechoslovak combat units on both eastern (primarily Slovak) and western fronts during World War II could not substitute for a battle in defense of the state. In popular perceptions, the military proved useless on the several occasions during the twentieth century when the Czechoslovak state came under threat.

The first such instance took place in 1938–39, when Nazi Germany threatened Czechoslovakia. In a pragmatic move, and after being abandoned by its allies (France and Britain), the Czechoslovak government surrendered to German demands even though the Czechoslovak armed forces rivaled, if not outclassed, the German military in quality of equipment and training, and even though the territory bordering Germany and Austria—forested, mountainous, and fortified—favored defense. The failure to fight stemmed from the political leadership's decision, and blaming the military seems misguided, but in popular imagery the military had failed the country. The second instance came in 1948, during the communist coup, when the Czechoslovak armed forces stayed in their barracks. Their inaction stemmed from a mixture of causes, including the genuine popularity of the communist party, the absence of anti-Russian

outlooks among the Czechs and Slovaks, and the image of the USSR as the main force responsible for the defeat of Nazi Germany. Another instance came in 1968, during the Warsaw Pact intervention to crush the reformist "Prague Spring," when the Czechoslovak military again stayed in their barracks. Again, the popular image seems misguided, because by the late 1960s, the thoroughly Soviet-penetrated Czechoslovak officer corps had become internally paralyzed by the split among its ranks between those who supported the reformers and those owed allegiance to the hard-liners and the Warsaw Pact.

In popular perceptions, and despite the inherent inaccuracies, the military proved useless on all three occasions. Driving the point home, following the 1968 intervention the Soviets retained a permanently stationed group of forces in Czechoslovakia, deployed primarily in Moravia and Slovakia. (Prior to 1968, the Soviets had shown greater trust in Czechoslovakia as an ally and had not stationed forces in the country, unlike the situation in Poland, Hungary, or East Germany.) In this sense, to many Czechs and Slovaks, the period after 1968 took on direct similarities to foreign occupation.

Moreover, the communist regime used the Czechoslovak military in an internal security role, assisting internal security forces in putting down strikes in 1953 and in dealing with demonstrations on the first anniversary of the Warsaw Pact intervention in 1969. In keeping with the communist model, the regime used the military as a tool for the socialization of conscripts, and the heavy dose of Marxist-Leninist indoctrination in the Czechoslovak communist armed forces made them appear to be a main pillar of the regime. Finally, two large-scale purges of the officer corps (post-1948 and post-1968) eliminated all but the most compliant and loyal officers, making the military seem a place fit only for those fully devoted to the regime.

The country's more than forty years of subservience toward the USSR and the subordination of the Czechoslovak armed forces to Soviet goals had far-reaching effects on the social stature of the armed forces by deepening the anti-military outlooks and pacifistic proclivities already widespread in Czechoslovakia (particularly in the Czech lands) at the popular level. Especially after the 1968 intervention and the subsequent purges in

the military, the Czechoslovak officer corps became perceived at the popular level as little more than a group of traitors serving a foreign power.[21] Despite the incentives offered by the regime, few young people chose the military as a career. Adding to the earlier negative image of soldiers, the officer corps became popularly perceived as a place for rejects unable to do anything else.

To top it all off, during the Velvet Revolution in late 1989, the Czechoslovak armed forces came close to intervening internally in defense of the communist regime. As the regime teetered on the brink of collapse, the defense minister, General Milan Vaclavik, ordered the armed forces to prepare for possible intervention. Although the regime capitulated and never gave orders to implement the plans, the top leadership of the armed forces proved ready to intervene.

In light of all the foregoing, many calls emerged after 1989 advocating the abolition of the Czechoslovak armed forces altogether. A process of decline in the prestige of the armed forces took place in the other Soviet satellite states as well. But anti-military outlooks and low regard for the military clearly went farthest in Czechoslovakia, because they built on earlier proclivities. Only Hungary came close to the Czechoslovak case in this sense.[22]

A historically conditioned distrust of the military certainly exists in the Czech Republic, but treating it in a deterministic fashion misses the point. Many other militaries have gone through periods of popular distrust and low prestige (for example, the US armed forces after the Vietnam war), yet have managed to recover public esteem rapidly. Although unfavorable popular myths have contributed to suspicion of the armed forces in the Czech lands, less abstract problems, such as widespread hazing practices among conscripts and low pay and poor conditions for professional soldiers, have kept the suspicion at high levels. An efficient, people-oriented, capable Czech military associated with defense of the democratic system could break quickly with the earlier negative images. That the Czech military has had to overcome strong negative preconceptions, however, has increased the importance of leadership, resources, and a well-designed plan of action for changing the armed forces. Until 1998, none of these elements had sufficiently materialized in the Czech Republic.

Military Reform

The Czech Republic has followed the general line of military reform in postcommunist central Europe. Specifically, this has entailed drastic declines in the size of the military (structure and personnel) and in defense budgets in comparison with pre-1989 levels and a switch to territorial-type deployment of the armed forces. The budgetary cutbacks have eroded the armed forces' combat capabilities because the extent of equipment and personnel reductions has not matched the extent of the drop in funds available under market conditions. The limited attention paid by the Czech political leadership to security and defense issues and the public's low esteem for the military have combined to worsen some of these problems.

The Czechoslovak Period

After the Velvet Revolution, the new Czechoslovak leadership instructed the military to change its planning, overall size, and force structure and to weed out personnel with suspect loyalty to a sovereign and noncommunist Czechoslovakia. The new political leadership directed the military to abandon planning against NATO in favor of planning against a threat from—theoretically—any direction. It also called on the military to institute a process of verification for the entire officer corps. By September 1990, some 15 percent of professional soldiers had left the armed forces, including more than half of all generals. All officers went through an interview process in order to remove the most undesirable elements.

Initially, General Milan Vaček, a communist holdover, served as minister of defense and directed the changes in the military. Luboš Dobrovský, a civilian and former dissident, replaced Vaček in October 1990. Dobrovský speeded up some of the reforms initiated by Vaček and reinvestigated Vaček's personnel verification process. He also implemented reforms of the defense ministry, separating it from actual troop command.[23] The impasse in Czech-Slovak negotiations, however, affected the functioning of the military—as it did all other Czechoslovak state institutions—resulting in only the initial implementation of Dobrovský's reforms. Although the military establishment tried to stay out of the political-ethnic tensions, a sense of uncertainty over the future of the

country and the military affected the functioning and reform of the armed forces.

After the June 1992 elections and the decision to divide the country, the Czech and Slovak representatives agreed to divide the military at a two-to-one ratio in favor of the Czechs, roughly approximating the territorial and population ratios of Czechs and Slovaks. In a compromise choice, a Slovak general, Imrich Andrejčak, became the last Czechoslovak defense minister and presided over the division of the armed forces. Interestingly, the actual split-up took place without any major problems or bickering over specific weapons systems, as Slovak and Czech officers worked out the technical issues of the division of military assets. The absence of problems showed that Czech and Slovak officers did not look upon each other as potential adversaries; they followed orders on the division of the country, though few of them either helped initiate or supported the breakup.

In an overall sense, the Czechoslovak military as an institution suffered greatly in the initial years after the regime change in 1989. The government slashed the defense budget by approximately 50 percent between 1989 and 1991, the officer corps went through two rounds of a humiliating personnel verification process designed to ensure loyalty to the country rather than to a foreign power, the basic tenets of Czechoslovak military planning changed, and the military's very existence became publicly and vocally questioned in the media and in the parliament. And yet, throughout this period (except during the crisis in November 1989), no signs appeared that the military contemplated any challenge to the new political authorities. One may question the extent of direct control the new civilian leadership actually had over the military, but problems in extending that control stemmed mostly from the civilians' lack of interest in and, especially, lack of expertise about the military. As an institution closely identified with the old regime, the military became discredited and weakened along with the delegitimation of the old regime.

The Czech Armed Forces in the Klaus Era

The Czech Republic inherited two-thirds of the partly transformed Czechoslovak armed forces. But more than the further reduction of the armed forces, what changed for the Czech defense establishment was

the strategic context for military planning. No longer bordering on the potentially unstable Ukraine, distanced from the ethnic Hungarian problems, and surrounded by four friendly states—against whom Czech planners found it inconceivable that they would fight in the foreseeable future—military planners seemed at a loss for plausible threats. The Czechoslovak "all-azimuth" defense attempted to adjust to a situation of nonthreat planning, though implicitly the political leadership saw a security threat from the former USSR. But nonthreat planning in the Czech Republic truly meant an almost complete lack of identifiable military threats. Under such circumstances, the role of the military really became one of providing a credible deterrent to an unspecified, hypothetical military contingency.

In 1993–94, the Czech defense establishment debated vigorously the preferred role for the armed forces in the new state and the strategy for the country's defense.[24] In accord with the fundamental goal of integration into Western security structures, all Czech military reform plans stipulated preparation of the armed forces for eventual entry into NATO. The first Czech strategic concept regarding the defense of the Czech Republic, prepared by the chief of staff, General Karl Pezl, in 1993, already envisioned Czech entry into Western security structures and the country's dependence on NATO reinforcement to deal with any major threat to its territory.[25] A long-range concept for the transformation of the Czech armed forces through 2005 followed, but it failed to win governmental approval. Indeed, the parliament failed to approve any of the concepts advanced by the Ministry of Defense. Only a general, four-page National Defense Strategy, hastily approved by the parliament in March 1997 in order to satisfy NATO requirements just prior to the Madrid summit, existed as a guideline for military planning as of early 1999.[26] Yet the vagueness of the document made it unsuitable to provide much guidance for military planners. As the Czech Republic entered the final stage of preparation for entry into NATO, more than five years after becoming independent, it still had no basic document outlining a security policy and military strategy.

The limited attention the parliament gave to security, its lack of expertise about the military, and its treatment of the armed forces as an unimportant institution certainly played roles in this awkward state of affairs,

but the leadership of the Ministry of Defense under the Klaus governments deserves much of the blame. Throughout the Klaus era, a minor coalition partner, the Christian-Democrats (KDU-CSL), held control of the defense portfolio. Three members of the KDU-CSL held the post of Minister of Defense successively under the Klaus coalition governments: Antonín Baudyš (January 1993–September 1994), Vilém Holáň (September 1994–June 1996), and Miloslav Výborný (June 1996–December 1997). None of them excelled in security issues, and none proved to be a particularly skilled or able manager. Each tinkered with the organizational structure of the ministry,[27] and each began his tenure questioning the previous verification processes within the armed forces (Baudyš presided over another round of verification, or screening, of the entire officer corps in 1993–94). Each man ended his short tenure amid scandals and tensions within the coalition.

Upon independence, the Czech armed forces had an active personnel strength of ninety-three thousand, less than one-half the strength of the Czechoslovak armed forces just three years previously. The blueprint for the evolution of the Czech armed forces until 2005 stipulated a reduction of the active force to sixty-five thousand, and the military reached that level in 1995.[28] The plan envisioned a gradual professionalization of the armed forces and maintenance of the existing conscription system only to train soldiers for the territorial forces. The concept also envisioned a transition from a division structure to one consisting of corps and brigades deployed fairly evenly in Bohemia and Moravia. In terms of force structure, the plan stipulated seven mechanized brigades (at various levels of readiness), one rapid reaction brigade (at a high level of readiness), support units, and a territorial force organized into fifteen brigades. In 1996–97, the Czech defense leadership scaled down aspects of the 2005 plan, reducing the readiness level of some of the units and abandoning some of the support and territorial formations altogether. The air force shrank to five main operating bases. Plans envisioned the modernization of some MiG-21s, the procurement of an indigenous light attack jet, the L-159, and the phasing out of most of the rest of the aircraft. In 1995–96, the Czech Republic exchanged all ten of its MiG-29s for eleven Polish multipurpose helicopters.

The initially large Czech defense budget shrank steadily after Czech

independence, both in absolute terms and as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP). From 2.3 percent of GDP in 1993, it slid to 1.7 percent in 1997. In real terms, Czech defense budgets since independence have hovered in the range of $800 million to $1 billion (fig. 4.1). The declining budgets took their toll on readiness by reducing the proficiency and training of the Czech armed forces; the air force was hardest hit. Indeed, as a result of a series of aircraft crashes in 1997, a group of air force officers sent an open letter to President Havel warning of the impending end of the Czech air force if current trends continued. Most of all, the low availability of funds delayed the procurement of new equipment or prolonged the acquisition cycles for items essential to the military's effective integration into NATO, such as communications equipment, in spite of the priority given to integration into NATO.

Corruption and scandals have accompanied the Czech acquisition and procurement process. Most of all, because of the limited expertise of the top leadership in the Ministry of Defense and the inattention to security and military affairs by the parliament, Czech procurement decisions during the Klaus governments lacked coherence. Evidence uncovered after the Klaus government fell shows that the changes in plans to

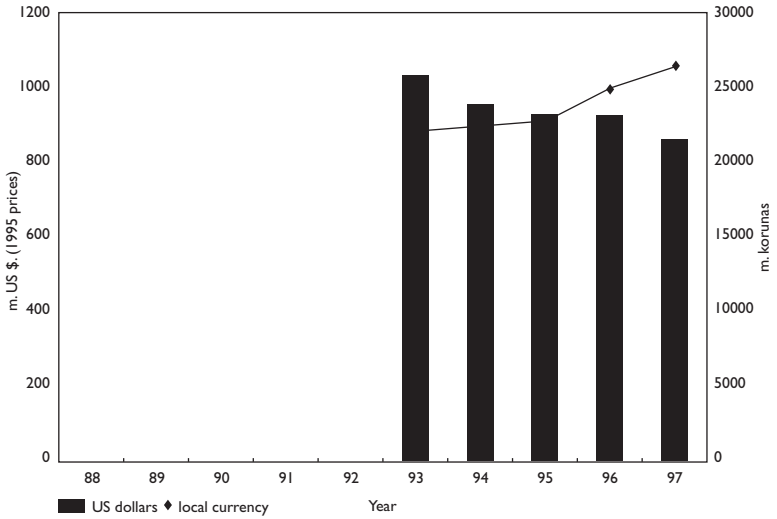

Figure 4.1 Czech Republic military expenditures, 1988–1997. Source: SIPRI, 1998.

modernize the MiG-21s, the controversy over modernization of the T-72 main battle tanks, and the ongoing procurement of the L-159 attack jet all stemmed more from intra-coalition politics, electoral considerations, and personal gain than from any clear military strategy. Of course, such rationales come up in other NATO countries (including the United States, as the case of the B-2 bomber shows) but they usually go hand in hand with the more common pattern of genuine competition and fair bidding. The latter pattern seemed in short supply in the Czech Republic during the Klaus era.

US and NATO officials noticed the readiness, training, and equipment problems just outlined. Even prior to the invitation to the Czech Republic to join NATO, as part of the Partnership and Review Process, Czech defense officials regularly consulted with NATO officials regarding the interoperability objectives to which the Czechs had agreed. And after the invitation, the Czech military filled out a detailed Defense Planning Questionnaire that served as a basis for coordinating the national plans of all members within the alliance. The wealth of information about the Czech military's shortcomings, combined with the incipient Czech entry into the alliance, led to strong criticisms of the Czech defense establishment by NATO. US defense officials even lambasted the Czech defense establishment publicly for insufficient progress in planning its integration into NATO,[29] contributing to the dissension and recriminations within the Klaus coalition in 1997.

In terms of civil-military relations, no questions arose concerning the dominance of civilians in the security sphere in the Czech Republic during Klaus's tenure. By any measure, the military complied fully with the directives of the civilians in the Ministry of Defense and accepted the liberal model of civil-military relations.[30] During Klaus's tenure, however, the civilians did not exhibit tremendous talent or skills in guiding the Czech military.[31] At the political level, the Czech leadership paid insufficient attention to military and security matters, and the parliament abdicated some of its responsibility. The civilians' treatment of the military also shows deep distrust of it among some of the ruling circles in the Czech Republic, an unhealthy phenomenon that has the potential to make the Czech armed forces less effective.

After Klaus

The two defense ministers who followed the KDU-CSL's hold on the ministry attempted to make progress in reforming the armed forces and preparing them for NATO. In doing so, they had to undo some of the mess they inherited from their predecessors under the Klaus governments. The defense minister during the caretaker Tosovsky government, Michal Lobkowicz, proved to be the most able administrator in the Czech defense ministry up to that time. Under Lobkowicz's tenure, the Ministry of Defense put together a conceptual outline for the development of the Czech armed forces until 2003, with guidelines until 2008.

The plan, approved just before the 1998 elections, amounted to a Czech blueprint for integration into NATO.[32] In terms of active force size, the armed forces were to shrink to fifty-six thousand personnel, with the professional component reaching 60 percent of the force. Conscription was to continue, with a twelve-month term of service. One rapid deployment brigade, two mechanized brigades, support units, and territorial forces were to make up the ground forces. Plans for the air force stipulated continued use of five main operating bases and a full transition to the L-159, supplemented by as-yet-unannounced, NATO-compatible, multipurpose aircraft (one of the following: F-16, F-18, JAS Gripen, Mirage 2000-5). If the Czech air force hoped to operate supersonic aircraft, the Czechs would need to purchase new aircraft by 2002, since the service life of the existing supersonic aircraft would run out in 2003. However, the enormous funds required for such a purchase remained elusive.[33] In view of the other pressing needs facing the armed forces, the persistent plans for procurement of supersonic, multipurpose aircraft seemed misguided and driven more by a desire for prestige than by any real military need. Suspecting corruption behind some procurement decisions under previous defense ministers, Lobkowicz launched investigations of some high-profile orders. In addition, he cancelled a number of programs and put others on hold, including the modernization of the main battle tanks.[34]

The current minister of defense, Vladimír Vetchy, began his tenure in July 1998, and it appeared that he would preside over the initial period of integration of the Czech armed forces into NATO. Vetchy's appointment

represented a clear departure from those of previous defense ministers. A former professional soldier (having served in the armed forces since the late 1970s), he was more knowledgeable about and experienced with the military than his predecessors had been. Vetchy also was a member of the communist party in the 1980s; as an officer, he was expected to join the party and was pressured to do so. Such a background stood in sharp contrast to those of the earlier ministers who presided over the verification campaign in the Czech officer corps.

Shortly after assuming his position, Vetchy placed Lobkowicz's defense plans through 2008 on hold for another review. Some of the differences in emphasis that Vetchy outlined included a move away from the eventual full professionalization that Lobkowicz had envisioned and greater attention to personnel and training than to procurement. Earlier plans called for procurement to amount to 20 percent of the defense budget, but reaching that goal seemed ambitious in view of the readiness shortcomings of the Czech armed forces. Most of all, Vetchy expressed chagrin over the inattention, mismanagement of resources, and corruption in the defense ministry during the Klaus administration.[35]

Because of the criticism of the Czech armed forces by NATO officials during the ratification debates in 1997–98, the Czech government obliged itself to increase its defense budget gradually (by 0.1 percent of GDP annually), so that it would amount to 2.0 percent of GDP in 2000. In 1998, the Czech parliament fulfilled its promise and raised the defense budget to a level of almost 1.9 percent of GDP. The move took place under pressure and amid criticism from NATO at a crucial time in the ratification process. Whether the new social-democrat-led government would abide by the agreement remained unclear. The fall of the Czech GDP by 0.7 percent in 1998 and increased pressures on the state budget threatened to make it difficult to keep the promise.

In terms of civil-military relations, no problems arose under Lobkowicz, nor had any arisen under Vetchy as of early 1999. Indeed, the administrative skill and genuine concern for the military that Lobkowicz showed seems to have made a good impression upon the armed forces and may have elevated the military's image of civilians.

Future Needs

The Czech armed forces have achieved compatibility with NATO in terms of their structure, but important elements still differentiate them from NATO's armed forces and make Czech operations in an alliance framework difficult. Insufficient progress in building a noncommissioned officer corps, continued lack of English language skills, unfamiliarity with NATO procedures and concepts, and low readiness and limited training (especially combined arms training) form the most important shortcomings.[36] Some of these, such as lack of English language skills and unfamiliarity with NATO procedures, will gradually fade away over the first decade of the twenty-first century as a new generation of Czech NCOs and officers enters the armed forces having already learned English in elementary and high school and having gained familiarity with NATO doctrine in Czech military educational institutions. Other shortcomings, such as the weakness of the NCO corps and the need for higher readiness, will require greater resources and sufficient administrative skill to overcome.

Although real, the equipment deficiencies of the Czech armed forces do not necessarily constitute as important a problem as those just listed. Rather than a massive spending spree, a far better solution lies in the selective upgrading of equipment, focusing primarily on making current equipment more lethal and accurate. Most of all, the elements listed above require a financially realistic, well-thought-out, long-term plan of integration, based on a consensus among the mainstream political parties in the Czech parliament. Otherwise, the measures will have an ad hoc quality about them and do little to address the overall goal.

The Czech defense establishment also has to tackle the military's image problem. With skilled managers and administrators, a more libertarian than authoritarian style of leadership, and improvements in social conditions for conscripts, the Czech armed forces could overcome the negative stereotyping they face in society and perhaps reverse the relatively low rate of staff retention.[37] But the entire way of thinking about individuals in the armed forces will need to change within the defense establishment. Rather than treating individuals as unimportant, the armed forces will need to reorient toward focusing on the individual soldier and making him feel valued, well trained, and supplied with appropriate equipment.

Such a change would truly mean a shift away from a communist-style military to a NATO-style military charged with upholding the security of a democratic community.

For a variety of reasons (poor leadership, insufficient attention to security and defense by the country's political leadership, ingrained anti-military outlooks, adjustment to a newly independent state and the breakup of the former federal state, and so forth), the Czech defense establishment fell behind that of Poland and even Hungary in terms of preparations for joining NATO and now has some catching up to do. It made substantial strides in the first half of 1998, but the momentum seemed uncertain under Vetchy's tenure at the Ministry of Defense. Despite the Czech Republic's peculiar problems regarding the military, the country remains wealthier than Poland or Hungary (in per-capita GDP), and if it were to invest in defense at GDP levels comparable to those of Poland and Hungary, it has the potential to have a military as good as, if not better than, those of the other two new members. If the Czech defense budget reaches and stays at the agreed-upon level of 2 percent of GDP, and if skilled administrators with realistic and well-thought-out plans run the defense establishment, no bar exists to the Czech armed forces' becoming a small but high-quality force valuable to the alliance within a decade.

The Czech Republic in NATO

What does NATO gain with Czech membership, and what kind of role will the Czech Republic play as an alliance member? For reasons simply of small size and an economy still adjusting to competitive market pressures, the Czech Republic can play only a minor role in the alliance for the foreseeable future. Just as Belgium and Portugal are not major military or political actors in the alliance, neither will be the Czech Republic. Regionally, the country can play an important role regarding NATO's actions vis-à-vis Slovakia. Shortly after the change of governments in Slovakia, the Czechs and Slovaks agreed to upgrade their military cooperation, and further ties are likely to develop. The Czech Republic may also be able to play a useful role regarding some of the smaller candidates for NATO, such as Slovenia, Lithuania, and Latvia.

Militarily, the Czech armed forces plan eventually to provide one rapid deployment brigade for NATO's projection missions; elements of the brigade are to become fully compatible with the alliance shortly after accession. A possible joint Czech-Polish-German unit (along the lines of the Polish-Danish-German corps, though probably of division size) might eventually form part of NATO's main defense forces. And the entry of the Czech Republic provides the alliance with access to infrastructure and geostrategic depth. In case of contingencies in Poland, the infrastructure in the Czech Republic can play an important role in supporting NATO operations. The same applies to possible NATO operations in the Balkans or eastern Europe. Of course, NATO might have had access to facilities in the Czech Republic in any case, without Czech membership, but the upgrading of the Czech infrastructure to compatibility with NATO's will proceed faster with membership because of NATO's infrastructure funds.

Despite the Czech Republic's small size, its contribution to NATO's missions could become highly valuable politically. Future NATO (or NATO-based) operations will probably take the form of "coalitions of the willing," and because of the Czech Republic's strong pro-US stand, Czech units would probably participate alongside US units even if many other NATO members declined to participate. During discussions of potential NATO action in Kosovo in 1998, the Czech Republic made preparations to contribute forces. It also made plans to provide a combat service support unit to a potential US-led contingency in the Persian Gulf in 1998. Thus, in an operation in which only a few NATO allies participate alongside the United States, the political value of the central Europeans' participation would outweigh their small military contribution. In addition, together with Poland, the Czech Republic can play a useful role in hypothetical alliance operations in some of the Slavic-speaking countries of central and eastern Europe. The IFOR/SFOR operation has already shown evidence of the value of the Poles and Czechs; because Czech and Polish speakers find Serbo-Croatian intelligible, Czech and Polish troops assigned to IFOR/SFOR have managed to understand conversations among Serbs and to prevent certain situations from escalating. Finally, some of the Czech special support units, such as chemical defense troops, could augment NATO forces if needed.

Does the Czech military contribution to NATO fall below reasonable levels? The real issue concerns which standards to use in measuring the Czechs' contribution and their role in the alliance. Some of the criticism aimed at the new members of NATO has focused on the supposedly poor quality of their armed forces. Often, the United States or Germany provides the standard of comparison in such judgments. But such comparisons miss the point, because the US and German armed forces are the most modern and best equipped in the world, and any military would look inferior when compared with them (especially with the United States). The standard to use in assessing the new members' contribution should be reasonable and should not exceed what the alliance expects of its current members. The Czech Republic has population and territory similar in size to those of current NATO member Portugal, although its economy remains substantially smaller than Portugal's. Consequently, aiming for an eventual contribution at a level close to Portugal's seems reasonable as a goal for the Czech Republic. The Czech Republic already matches the Portugese contribution of one brigade for NATO missions. If the Czechs implement their plans for improved training and equipment of the NATO-earmarked unit, then their contribution will be at least on a par with that of the Portugese.

In view of anti-military outlooks in the Czech Republic, the country's enviably good relations with its neighbors, and the already demonstrated Czech tendencies toward limiting expenditures on defense, will the Czech Republic move toward "free riding"—defined as spending less than 1.5 percent of GDP on defense—within the alliance? The Czech Republic seems likely to be an average or below-average NATO member in terms of contribution, but not a free rider in the near term. Keeping in mind that, in the post-Cold War period, the mean for European NATO countries in defense spending has fallen to about 2 percent of GDP and may decline further, then the Czech Republic will fall near the middle among European NATO members in terms of spending on defense. In at least the short-term (until 2003), a number of factors make Czech free riding unlikely. Most of all, for purposes of making NATO membership effective, the Czech leadership needs to demonstrate that it takes alliance commitments seriously in its initial period of membership. That entails

making reasonable progress in meeting target force goals (NATO's mechanism for coordinating the military plans of members). Without such progress, doubts will surround NATO's commitment to the new member, in effect making alliance membership hollow and the concomitant deterrent less credible.

In addition, the Czech Republic has a strong interest in making the initial round of NATO enlargement successful in order to keep the door open to Slovakia (and Austria). If the initial round of enlargement is assessed a failure, it will delay or even put in doubt further enlargement of the alliance. The Czech Republic's long-term security interests entail the integration of neighboring countries into European multilateral structures, in order to remove the possibility of even secondary or tertiary threats to Czech territory emanating from Slovakia. That incentive probably will moderate any Czech proclivities toward early free riding.

Beyond the short and medium term, if a benign security environment continues to hold, a Czech tendency toward free riding might increase. By that time, however, the Czech armed forces will probably have gone a long way toward becoming successfully integrated into the alliance, making lower defense expenditures less salient. In any event, with the growth of the Czech economy, the defense budget may still increase in absolute terms despite decreases relative to GDP.

In summary, from a NATO perspective, the benefits that Czech membership brings to the alliance cannot be separated from the criteria used to assess what is reasonable and expected from current and future members. The Czech Republic is likely to be among the more pro-US members in the alliance. It is likely to contribute small but potentially politically important forces to future NATO operations. The size and usefulness of the contribution will vary according to the speed of integration of the Czech military into NATO. With skilled leadership at the Czech defense ministry, greater attention to defense matters by the Czech government, and well-targeted assistance measures, the size and effectiveness of the Czech military contribution will increase. But perhaps the most important benefit of Czech entry into NATO is the further erasing of the legacy of Soviet communist domination in Europe. That was the political goal and the main motive for NATO's enlargement; the alliance did not

enlarge for military reasons. Any strictly military gains resulting from the first round of enlargement are little more than marginal benefits in view of the enormous political gains accruing to the United States as it leads the process toward a more integrated, democratic, and unified Europe that will be a US security partner for the foreseeable future.

Notes

1. Roman Blasek, "Perception of Security Risks by the Population of the Czech Republic," *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 11, no. 3 (September 1998): 89–96.

2. Analysts and policymakers have noticed the low level of Czech enthusiasm for joining NATO. The Czechs' seeming reluctance has provided ammunition to those skeptical about NATO's enlargement and has raised doubts among others about what kind of member the Czech Republic will be. See, for example, Robert H. Dorff, "Public Opinion and NATO Enlargement," in Stephen J. Blank, ed., *NATO after Enlargement: New Challenges, New Missions, New Forces* (Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania: Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, 1998), 5–37.

3. *Czech National Interests* (Prague: Institute for International Relations, 1993); *The Security Policy of the Czech Republic* (Prague: Institute for International Relations, 1997).

4. The IIR documents have received substantial coverage in the main Czech military theoretical journal, *Vojenské Rozhledy.* See Antonín Leška, "Bezpečnostní aspekty českych národních zájmú" (The security aspects of Czech national interests), *Vojenské Rozhledy* 2 (1993), no. 10: 28–38. The guidelines for Czech security policy proposed by the IIR are implicit in numerous articles in *Vojenské Rozhledy* in 1997–98.

5. *Security Policy of the Czech Republic,* 47–48.

6. Major General Emil Antušák and Petr Svozil, "Současná evropská bezpečnost a národní zájmy ČR" (Present European security and national interests of the Czech Republic), *Vojenské Rozhledy* 5 (1996), no. 6: 3–7.

7. The eagerness of the Czech population to join the EU has not changed substantially since 1993, with generally about three out of four Czechs in favor. For example, an August 1998 poll (by STEM) showed a level of support for EU membership of 72.5 percent in the Czech Republic. Newsletter from the Czech Embassy in the USA, September 1998, http://www.czech.cz/washington.

8. For time-series public opinion poll data on support for NATO membership in the Czech Republic, see Štefan Sarvaš, "Attitudes of the Czech Public toward National Security, the Military, and NATO Membership," *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 11, no. 3 (September 1998): 56–88.

9. The Czech Republic is one of five former communist countries invited for "fast-track" negotiations on membership in the EU. However, it increasingly appears that earlier optimistic expectations of joining the EU in 2002–2003 may be pushed back to 2005 or later.

10. *Security Policy of the Czech Republic,* 50; *Czech National Interests,* 28–29.

11. *Security Policy of the Czech Republic,* 16; *Czech National Interests,* 25.

12. *Security Policy of the Czech Republic,* 16; *Czech National Interests,* 27–28.

13. *Security Policy of the Czech Republic,* 14.

14. *Security Policy of the Czech Republic,* 14–18. In this sense, Czech views are in agreement with other NATO countries' views of probable threats to European security. See Stanislav Jurnečka, "Konflikty Nízké a Střední Úrovné" (Low- and mid-level conflicts), *Vojenské Rozhledy* 2 (1993), no. 4: 4–14.

15. Since the Czech Republic was invited to join NATO in 1997, discussions of Czech defensive operations in *Vojenske Rozhledy* have portrayed only cases of defense against aggression coming from the territory of the Czech Republic's two non-NATO neighbors, Austria and Slovakia. Of course, such scenarios are hypothetical and implausible, in view of the Czech Republic's good relations with Austria and the post-Mečiar government in Slovakia. But they do represent vividly the fact that the Czech Republic faces few threats; its planning sometimes verges on the unreal. See Milan Kubeša, "Způsoby použití armády české republiky" (Ways of deploying the army of the Czech Republic), *Vojenské Rozhledy* 7 (1998), no. 1: 46–55.

16. *Security Policy of the Czech Republic,* 61–63.

17. *Czech National Interests,* 25–26.

18. Explicit public references to Russia as somehow an adversary of the Czech Republic are rare. But implicitly, the instability in Russia and its early post-imperial stage is a cause of concern to the Czech security establishment. See *Security Policy of the Czech Republic,* 40–41.

19. František Turnovec, "Votes, Seats, and Power: 1996 Parliamentary Election in the Czech Republic," *Communist and Postcommunist Studies* 30, no. 3 (1997): 289–305. The elections resulted in the Klaus-led coalition's being one vote short of a majority, but Klaus managed to hold onto power for over a year with the help of a maverick opposition party member.

20. Czech sociologists acknowledge the historical roots as a contributing reason for the poor prestige of the Czech armed forces. See Sarvaš, "Attitudes of the Czech Public."

21. Survey research has demonstrated the huge drop in the prestige of professional soldiers in the aftermath of the 1968 Warsaw Pact intervention. See Jiří Hodný, "The Prestige of Professional Czech Soldiers in the Eyes of the General Public," *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 11, no. 3 (September 1998): 97–104.

22. A Eurobarometer survey in 1994 showed that among the former non-Soviet Warsaw Pact countries, the Czech armed forces scored lowest in terms of trust, gaining 4.1 on a 7-point scale (with 7 being maximum trust). The figures for other countries were Romania, 5.5; Poland, 4.8; Bulgaria, 4.6; Slovakia, 4.4;

and Hungary, 4.3. See data in William Mishler and Richard Rose, "Trust, Distrust, and Skepticism: Popular Evaluations of Civil and Political Institutions in Post-communist Societies," *Journal of Politics* 59, no. 2 (May 1997): 418–451.

23. For more detailed information, see the chapter on Czechoslovakia in Jeffrey Simon, *NATO Enlargement and Central Europe: A Study in Civil-Military Relations* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University, Institute for National Strategic Studies, 1996), 191–210.

24. In 1993, the Czech defense establishment put forth many interesting and innovative ideas regarding an optimal manner of providing for Czech security and the Czech military's role in it. The main Czech professional military journal, *Vojenské Rozhledy,* contained numerous discussion articles on strategies for defense of the Czech Republic and the concept of evolution of the armed forces. For examples, see Emil Antušák, "Další kolo reorganizace armády před námi" (The next stage of reorganization of the army is ahead of us), *Vojenské Rozhledy* 2 (1993), no. 3: 3–6; Otakar Vlach, "Možnosti a účinnost obrany České Republiky po rozdčlení ČSFR" (Possibilities of effective defense of the Czech Republic after the division of the CSFR), *Vojenské Rozhledy* 2 (1993), no. 1: 27–34; Antonín Rašek, "Systém obrany České Republiky a jeho tvorba" (The Czech Republic's defense system and its construction), *Vojenské Rozhledy* 2 (1993), no. 3: 27–39.

25. "Koncepce výstavby armády ČR do roku 1996" (A concept for the building of the army of the Czech Republic until 1996), *Vojenské Rozhledy* 2 (1993), no. 7: 5–26.

26. "Národní obranná strategie" (The national defense strategy), *Vojenské Rozhledy* 6 (1997), no. 2: 3–12.

27. For more detailed information, see the chapter on the Czech Republic in Simon, *NATO Enlargement and Central Europe,* 213–251.

28. For a detailed look at the Czech military shortly after independence, see Stéphane Lefebvre, "The Army of the Czech Republic: A Status Report," *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 8, no. 4 (December 1995): 718–751.

29. Frank Kramer, the US assistant secretary of defense, was brutally frank in meetings with Czech defense officials in September 1997 and has not shied away from expressing some criticism in public.

30. One of the best definitions of the principle of civilian control of the military is this one: "First, the ends of government policy are to be set by civilians; the military is limited to decisions about means. In other words, the military are to be policy implementers, not policymakers. Second, it is for the civilian leadership to decide where the line between ends and means (and hence between civilian and military responsibility) is to be drawn." Kenneth W. Kemp and Charles Hudlin, "Civil Supremacy over the Military: Its Nature and Limits," *Armed Forces and Society* 19, no. 1 (Fall 1992): 7–26, quote on 8–9.

31. For an insightful look at Czech civil-military relations, see Marybeth Peterson Ulrich, "U.S. Assistance and Military Democratization in the Czech Republic," *Problems of Postcommunism* 45, no. 2 (March–April 1998): 22–32; and Marybeth Peterson Ulrich, "The Democratization of Civil-Military Relations in

the Czech Republic," in *The Military and Society in Post-Communist Countries,* Constantine Danoupoulous, ed. (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1998).

32. For more about the Czech plans, see "Country Briefing: The Czech Republic," *Jane's Defense Weekly* (May 20, 1998): 18–27.

33. The cost of twenty-four new F-16 or F-18 fighter aircraft and their support package is more than $1 billion, an amount that exceeds the entire annual defense budget of the Czech Republic. The US has offered the no-cost, five-year lease of a handful (less than a dozen) surplus F-16s or F-18s to begin the process of Czech transition to NATO-type aircraft. The Czechs had not accepted the offer as of early 1999. See "Military Aviation Review: Czech Republic, Free U.S. Fighters," *World Airpower Journal* 30 (Fall 1997): 5.

34. The tank modernization scheme demonstrates the ad hoc feel to the whole process of Czech procurement and modernization during the Klaus era. Moving to a light force appropriate for NATO projection missions does not necessitate tanks. Even a credible deterrent to a potential threat to the territory of the Czech Republic entails effective and cheap anti-tank weapons, but not necessarily tanks. Yet the Czech ministry of defense awarded contracts to a consortium of companies for the modernization of tanks. A more prudent course of action would have entailed the preparation of an appropriate strategy for defense first, proceeding then to procurement of equipment.

35. Interview with Vladimír Vetchy, *Pravo,* 7 November 1998, 17, in FBIS-EEU-98–335, 1 December 1998.

36. For an excellent and comprehensive elaboration of the training problems faced by the three new members of NATO, see David M. Glantz, "Military Training and Education Challenges in Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic," *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 11, no. 3 (September 1998): 1–55.

37. The Czech military has the worst record of the three new NATO members in retaining young officers trained at military educational institutions in current NATO countries (though none of the three has done particularly well in retaining such personnel). In late 1997, the problem gained wide publicity because of the departure of Lieutenant Petr Vohralík from the Czech military. As the first Czech graduate of the US Army Academy at West Point, Vohralík was portrayed as an example of the "new look" of the Czech armed forces and the officer corps; a Czech military weekly aimed at young officers and conscripts even featured a lengthy interview with Vohralík (*A Report* 14 [1997]: 8–9). Vohralík's departure and his highly critical remarks about the state of the Czech armed forces amounted to a major embarrassment for the Czech military.