



Weekly Briefing

**Czech Republic external relations briefing:
Deepening Alliance with Washington: DCA & Military Deals**
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Deepening Alliance with Washington: DCA & Military Deals

Summary

The Czech-US relations were given an impetus in April due to the official visit paid by Ministers of Defence and Foreign Affairs to the US. The liberal cabinet has done its best to boost the bilateral relationship as demonstrated by the recently presented idea of the establishment of the US military base in the Czech Republic which was not apparently consulted with Washington in advance. The foreign policy course has become hawkish and strongly supportive of a tough anti-Russian stance, confrontation with and containment of Russia. This policy finds expression in massive military supplies to the Ukraine.

Introduction

In April, the strongest party of the ruling coalition Civic Democratic Party (ODS) convened its congress where Prime Minister Petr Fiala defended successfully the position of the party chairman. The event took place in a euphoric atmosphere. The fighting spirit was strengthened by the participation of the Ukrainian ambassador to Prague Evgenii Perebiinis who praised the Czech cooperation with Kiev and massive support carried out by the Czech Government led by Petr Fiala as well as his tough anti-Russian stance.¹ Prime Minister emphasised the need for the fight against „Russian aggressors“ while appreciating the absence of the influence of political opposition („populists“ and „extremists“) on the state policies at home.²

US military base in the Czech Republic?

Expressing full support for liberal democracy, human rights, Ukraine's struggle against Russia and chanting the infamous „Glory to Ukraine“, the delegates applauded Minister of Defence Jana Černochová who announced the plan to establish a US military base in the Czech

¹ Kopecký, J. (2022, April 09). *ODS opět vede premiér Fiala. Stojíme těsně pod vrcholem, prohlásil.* iDNES.cz. https://www.idnes.cz/zpravy/domaci/kongres-ods-volba-noveho-vedeni-vystoupeni-hostu-koalicni-strany-ukrajina-perebyinis.A220409_053403_domaci_kop.

² *Máme štěstí, že už se vláda neopírá o komunisty a proruské extremisty, řekl Fiala na kongresu ODS* (2022, April 08). iROZHLAS. https://www.irozhlas.cz/zpravy-domov/petr-fiala-premier-ods-volebni-kongres-vedeni-spolu_2204081717_gut.

Republic.³ This statement provoked tempestuous reactions both among politicians and society. The opposition more or less disagrees with such an intent. Deputies of the Freedom and Direct Democracy movement warn that a possible US military base would damage the national security, Communists have initiated a public petition.⁴ Other non-parliamentary subjects – including the national conservative Tricolour whose support is on the rise – arranged demonstrations.⁵ Former PM and leader of the strongest opposition party Andrej Babiš is also sceptical and does not support the establishment of the US base.⁶ Last but not least, Minister of Defence's idea has not found sympathy of President Miloš Zeman. The strong reaction and public resistance despite the Russophobic campaign that is going on forced the liberal cabinet to back away. On the one hand, PM Fiala insists on the plan of the US base, on the other, nevertheless, has declared that no bilateral negotiations are underway and Washington has not initiated them either.⁷

Civic Democratic Party attempted to bring the US military along to the Czech Republic in the past. The ODS-led Government launched formal talks with the US in 2007 with the aim to build a radar base on the Czech territory within the US concept of the European Interceptor Site (EIS), officially intended to protect the US and their allies against missiles from Iran. Even though the public strongly opposed the US system, the agreement was signed in 2008. The Chamber of Deputies, however, did not ratify the document and the new US President Barack Obama cancelled the EIS, being replaced by the Aegis Ballistic Missile Defence System (ABMD) without the direct involvement of the Czech Republic (unlike Poland). The same domestic political forces are seemingly trying to misuse the current frictions with Russia to revive the old plans to make the country more dependent on the US. After the public discontent, nevertheless, the Minister of Defence has been made to mitigate her radical rhetoric and put the question of military base aside. At the same time, the cabinet as well as President Zeman are in

³ *Ukrajinský velvyslanec na kongresu ODS. Obdiv Fialovi a Vystrčilovi, žádost o další zbraně a sankce* (2022, April 09). ParlamentníListy.cz. <https://www.parlamentnilisty.cz/arena/monitor/Ukrajinsky-velvyslanec-na-kongresu-ODS-Obdiv-Fialovi-a-Vystrcilovi-zadost-o-dalsi-zbrane-a-sankce-698655>.

⁴ Szaban, O. (2022, April 11). *Černochová jede do USA domlout americké vojáky u nás. Už se to řeší mezi politiky. Padlo i "předčasné volby"*. ParlamentníListy.cz. <https://www.parlamentnilisty.cz/arena/monitor/Cernochova-jede-do-USA-domlout-americke-vojaky-u-nas-Uz-se-to-resi-mezí-politiky-Padlo-i-predcasne-volby-698859>.

⁵ *Už to začalo: Boj proti základně NATO. BIS. Věc na Černochovou* (2022, April 10). ParlamentníListy.cz. <https://www.parlamentnilisty.cz/arena/monitor/Uz-to-zacalo-Boj-proti-zakladne-NATO-BIS-Vec-na-Cernochovou-698752>.

⁶ *Babiš nechce americkou základnu v Česku, byl by pro referendum* (2022, April 11). Seznam Zprávy. <https://www.seznamzpravy.cz/clanek/domaci-politika-babis-nechce-americkou-zakladnu-v-cesku-byl-by-pro-referendum-197967>.

⁷ *Zeman souhlasí s obrannou smlouvou s USA, řekl Fiala. Debata o základně ale nemá smysl, řekl* (2022, April 12). Echo24.cz. <https://echo24.cz/a/SknJa/zeman-souhlasí-s-obrannou-smlouvou-s-usa-rekl-fiala-debata-o-zakladne--ale-nema-smysl-rekl>.

favour of strengthening military cooperation and transatlantic ties through the Defence Cooperation Agreement (DCA).

Military cooperation

The Minister paid an official visit to the US in April within which the problem of the DCA was the most important one. Interestingly, Minister of Defence Jana Černochová was accompanied by Tomáš Pojar, foreign and security policy advisor of the PM who was in Kiev in March and who was the Czech Republic's main negotiator regarding the US radar base in the 2000s, as well as by Jan Beroun, Director of the Military Intelligence who was awarded a medal by the US Defense Intelligence Agency in 2020. Military Intelligence has played a crucial role in the recent non-legal blocking of the Czech media.⁸ According to some sources, the Czech representatives held talks not only with the Department of Defence but also with the CIA.⁹ During the visit, preparation of the DCA commenced. The agreement is to set the legal framework for the US military units on the Czech territory including the essential problem of jurisdiction over the US soldiers. DCAs with the US have been already signed by 24 out of 29 members of NATO. The agreement has been recently concluded by Slovakia in which the US jurisdiction is stipulated.¹⁰ Such extraterritoriality poses multiple risks and shows dependence on the foreign power. At the same time, the DCA itself does not entitle Pentagon to send troops to the Czech Republic. The decision has to be approved by the Parliament, including an exact period of time.¹¹

Although the DCA talks are at the very beginning, both sides signed the Reciprocal Defence Procurement Agreement (RDPA) which was to facilitate the Czech enterprises to tender for military contracts in the US. It indicates the rising bilateral cooperation in the military field. Moreover, Minister Černochová emphasised the goal of modernisation of the Czech

⁸ Cibulka, J. (2022, April 05). *Hybridně působí ve prospěch Ruska. 'Vojenští rozvědčící zveřejnili dopis, proč žádali blokaci webů.* iROZHLAS. https://www.irozhlas.cz/zpravy-domov/vz-rozvedka-armada-blokace-webu-cenzura-svoboda-projevu_2204050644_cib.

⁹ Šídlová, T., Málek, A. (2022, April 20). *S Černochovou letí do USA i zpravodajec Beroun.* Seznam Zprávy. <https://www.seznamzpravy.cz/clanek/domaci-politika-s-cernochovou-leti-do-usa-i-zpravodajec-beroun-198932>.

¹⁰ Šídlová, T., Gavenda, J. (2022, April 12). *Jednání o americké základně: Černochová jede do USA s jasným úkolem.* Seznam Zprávy. <https://www.seznamzpravy.cz/clanek/domaci-politika-o-cem-jede-cernochova-jednat-do-usa-zakladna-to-zrejme-nebude-198011>.

¹¹ Fajnor, J. (2022, April 22). *Dohoda s USA přinese České republice především bezpečnostní záruky a nastaví právní rámec spolupráce.* Ministerstvo obrany. <https://mocr.army.cz/informacni-servis/zpravodajstvi/dohoda-s-usa-prinese-ceske-republice-predevsim-bezpecnostni-zaruky-a-nastavi-pravni-ramec-spoluprace-234941/>.

Army through substitution of the Soviet/Russian equipment.¹² The Czech side has already purchased the US helicopters, and further steps regarding not only helicopters but also fighters or tank forces were discussed in Washington.¹³ Secretary of Defence Lloyd Austin appreciated the Czech Republic's tough stance towards Moscow and active engagement in the Ukrainian conflict. The US representative followed the misleading narrative equating the Warsaw Pact's invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 with the present military operation. Last but not least, the US side welcomed the Czech participation in strengthening NATO's eastern flank. The Czech Republic has become a framework nation in the new NATO battlegroup in Slovakia which was agreed upon in March.¹⁴

Political cooperation and supplies to Kiev

Minister of Defence Jana Černočová was not the only representative who paid an official visit to the US in April. Minister of Foreign Affairs Jan Lipavský arrived at Washington to meet his counterpart Antony Blinken. The agenda of the meeting was affected significantly both by the Ukrainian crisis and the radical Czech Republic's foreign policy under the current liberal cabinet. Whereas Antony Blinken exhibited certain moderation, the Czech Foreign Minister reiterated the commonplaces of the official discourse including the need for US military presence in Europe without which the international order is put into question, the existential threat allegedly posed by Russia to the European nations, „Russian imperialism“ or revival of the „Soviet expansionism“.¹⁵ Foreign Minister argued for sharpening of the anti-Russian sanctions, closer military and nuclear cooperation, joint struggle against „autocracies“, development of relations with Taipei and introduction of the so-called Magnitski Act in the

¹² For greater detail see Zemánek, L. (2022, January 11). *Securitisation of the Social Sphere: Synchronic and Diachronic Perspective*. China-CEE Institute. <https://china-cee.eu/2022/01/11/czech-republic-social-briefing-securitisation-of-the-social-sphere-synchronic-and-diachronic-perspective/>.

¹³ Fajnor, J. (2022, April 21). *Minister Černočová discussed defence cooperation and Armed Forces modernisation with U.S. Defense Secretary Austin*. Ministry of Defence & Armed Forces. <https://www.army.cz/en/ministry-of-defence/newsroom/news/minister-cernochova-discussed-defence-cooperation-and-armed-forces-modernisation-with-u-s--defense-secretary-austin-234948/>.

¹⁴ *Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III Remarks Welcoming Czech Defense Minister Jana Černočová to the Pentagon* (2022, April 21). U.S. Department of Defense. <https://www.defense.gov/News/Transcripts/Transcript/Article/3007242/secretary-of-defense-lloyd-j-austin-iii-remarks-welcoming-czech-defense-ministe/>.

¹⁵ *Secretary Antony J. Blinken and Czech Republic Foreign Minister Jan Lipavský Before Their Meeting* (2022, April 26). U.S. Department of State. <https://www.state.gov/secretary-antony-j-blinken-and-czech-republic-foreign-minister-jan-lipavsky-before-their-meeting/>.

Czech Republic.¹⁶ The discussed agenda thus coincided with the nodal points of the US-Czech joint statement on strategic dialogue, issued in March in Prague.¹⁷

The Czech Republic has become one of the leaders in the military support of Kiev. The Ministry of Defence refuses to comment on concrete supplies and future plans, nevertheless, Minister Černochová admitted that the military supplies had already exceeded 2 billion CZK (82 million EUR) by April, 20.¹⁸ According to some estimates, the figure could be more than 10 billion CZK (412 million EUR).¹⁹ These supplies have comprised of artillery shells, small arms and ammunition (handguns, SA58 rifles, Dragunov and Falcon sniper rifles), short-range surface-to-air missile system 9K35 Strela-10M, tanks T-72M, infantry fighting vehicles BVP-1, wheeled self-propelled howitzers DANA and 2S1 Gvozdika or rocket launchers RM-70 Grad.²⁰ It is not excluded that the Czech side will also provide Kiev with attack helicopters Mi-24 which can be replaced by a new US equipment.²¹ Ministry of Defence has already asked for several billion CZK for new military purchases. The liberal cabinet is also considering purchases of fighter planes, possibly the US-manufactured F-16. „Hawkish“ government representatives, moreover, call for circumventing standard proceedings including the tender to purchase it immediately. Some journalists believe that this question was discussed during the Černochová-Austin talks.²² The events in the Ukraine have contributed to the acceleration of militarisation and modernisation of the Czech Army as well as to deepening military cooperation between Prague and Washington.

¹⁶ *Ministr Lipavský na jednání s americkým protějškem Antonym Blinkenem potvrdil pokračování společné podpory Ukrajiny* (2022, March 27). Ministerstvo zahraničních věcí České republiky. https://www.mzv.cz/jnp/cz/udalosti_a_media/tiskove_zpravy/ministr_lipavsky_na_jednani_s_americkym.html.

¹⁷ *Joint Statement from the U.S.-Czech Republic Strategic Dialogue* (2022, March 30). U.S. Department of State. <https://www.state.gov/joint-statement-from-the-u-s-czech-republic-strategic-dialogue/>.

¹⁸ Machová, M. (2022, April 20). *Černochová odlétá do USA: Chci dát jasný signál, že chceme patřit na Západ*. Seznam Zprávy. <https://www.seznamzpravy.cz/clanek/domaci-politika-cernochova-odleta-do-usa-chci-dat-jasny-signal-ze-chceme-patrit-na-zapad-198888>.

¹⁹ Fujáček, J. (2022, April 22). *Z Česka odjely na Ukrajinu i obojživelné houfnice Karafiat*. Echo24.cz. <https://echo24.cz/a/SCgUP/z-ceska-odjely-na-ukrajinu-i-obojzivelne-houfnice-karafiat>.

²⁰ Samek, J. (2022, April 25). *Česká vojenská pomoc bojující Ukrajině patří k těm nejvýznamnějším*. CZDEFENCE. <https://www.czdefence.cz/clanek/ceska-vojenska-pomoc-bojujici-ukrajine-patri-k-tem-nejvyznamnejsim>.

Fujáček, J. (2022, April 17). *Česko je lídrem v dodávkách těžké techniky na Ukrajinu, velmoci zatím zaostávají*. Echo24.cz. <https://www.echo24.cz/a/SsDPy/cesko-je-lidrem-v-dodavkach-tezke-techniky-na-ukrajinu-velmoci-zatim-zaostavaji>.

²¹ Machová, M. (2022, April 20). *Černochová odlétá do USA: Chci dát jasný signál, že chceme patřit na Západ*. Seznam Zprávy. <https://www.seznamzpravy.cz/clanek/domaci-politika-cernochova-odleta-do-usa-chci-dat-jasny-signal-ze-chceme-patrit-na-zapad-198888>.

²² Šídlová, T. (2022, April 28). *Nakoupit stíhačky bez tendru? Vláda chce uspišit zakázku za miliardy*. Seznam Zprávy. <https://www.seznamzpravy.cz/clanek/domaci-politika-nakoupit-stihacky-bez-tendru-vlada-chce-uspisit-zakazku-za-miliardy-199816>.

Conclusion

The Czech Republic's military as well as political, diplomatic and humanitarian support to the Ukraine is massive and unprecedented. It is demonstrated not only by military supplies but also by official visits of the political representatives in Kiev. While PM Petr Fiala met Vladimir Zelenskii in March, the Senate mission headed by the Chairman of the upper chamber Miloš Vystrčil arrived at Ukraine's capital in April. The senators expressed their support for Ukraine to join the EU.²³ The Czech Republic could also become a place of the EU-Ukraine summit within the Czech presidency of the Council of the EU in the second half of the year. The cabinet has allegedly started negotiations over Zelenskii's visit to Prague.²⁴

²³ Vystrčil v Kyjevě přirovnal Buču a další ukrajinská města k Lidicím a Ležákům (2022, April 14). iDNES.cz. https://www.idnes.cz/zpravy/domaci/vystrcil-senat-ukrajina-navsteva-senator.A220414_064546_domaci_lisv.

²⁴ Šídlová, T. (2022, April 15). *Vláda chce v Praze uspořádat summit se Zelenským*. Seznam Zprávy. <https://www.seznamzpravy.cz/clanek/domaci-vlada-chce-v-praze-usporadat-summit-se-zelenskym-198408>.