



Weekly Briefing

Czech Republic political briefing:
New Security Strategy Passed: A Content Analysis
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New Security Strategy Passed: A Content Analysis

Summary

The new Security Strategy depicts the overall security environment and defines national security goals. It reflects the rapidly changing geopolitical, geoeconomic and security landscape while adopting concepts and discourse outlined by US, NATO and—to a lesser degree—EU actors and their recent normative documents. The briefing analyses individual sections of the Security Strategy and conducts an internal critique with the aim to reveal inner contradictions if these exist. The provisions are put into a broader international context and assessment of strong and weak points is carried out.

Introduction

The Czech government passed a new national security strategy in June.¹ It is a central normative document whose priorities and provisions will be further embedded in related partial strategies in individual areas. The 2023 Security Strategy differs from the version from 2015 in many respects and leaves virtually no leeway for multivector external policy. At the same time, its emphasis on a comprehensive, holistic attitude towards national security accompanied by a concern with new domains creates favourable conditions for the possible strengthening of resilience and protection of the Czech Republic. Nonetheless, the document is inherently contradictory and its coherence and consistency are, therefore, doubtful.

Security environment

The new version of the Security Strategy builds on and reflects the NATO Strategic Concept and the EU Strategic Compass. Even though it does not include any explicit references to US strategies and policies, it is more than obvious that the Czech Security Strategy is broadly dependent on their concepts and discourse. This fact has an immense impact at the national level. The key normative document formulates security policy principles upon which concrete

¹ *Security Strategy of the Czech Republic 2023* (2023, June). Ministry of Foreign Affairs. https://www.mzv.cz/file/5123495/MZV_BS_A4_brochure_WEB_ENG_1_.pdf

security interests are defined. These are framed by a description of the present security environment. Let's analyse these three constitutive parts.

From the perspective of the new Security Strategy, the changing global security environment is shaped by a “joint anti-systemic drive” on the part of China and Russia which are behind the intensifying attempts to transform and replace the rules-based international order with an alternative one. The presence of this narrative emerges from the concept of the clash between “democracies” and “autocracies” which has become the central element of the US (and Western) political discourse. Liberal democracies are presented as the protectors of the status quo in contrast to the revisionist actions of “autocratic” actors. Furthermore, the concept of rules-based order (RBO) is identified with the very notion of the international system whose foundations were laid by the establishment of the UN upon the end of World War II. But there is confusion at this point because the UN system is a source of international law while the liberal democracies increasingly often refer to “rules”. The latter, however, is different from international law, being formulated and imposed upon others by the hegemonic actors who are objectively capable to do so, thus breaching the inclusive, democratic and multilateral nature of the UN system. A comparison of the incidence of the concepts of “international law” in contrast to “rules-based order” in the 2023 Security Strategy confirms this observation. While the former appears only once, the latter—six times. The hegemonic discourse, therefore, replaces international law with rules and promulgates the RBO as the only legitimate international order which has to be protected against “revisionist” actors. Paradoxically, “autocracies” and their foreign policy agenda which is embedded in international law and the principles of peaceful coexistence are closer to the original UN system than the concept of RBO.

The Czech Security Strategy adopts the US Administration perspective on Russia as the “immediate”, “direct” threat and China—as a “fundamental systemic challenge”. Interestingly, the “Russian threat” is described not in terms of a threat to *international law* but to the *rules-based order*. Taking this assertion literally, the authors are undoubtedly right, since Moscow does not accept the very idea of RIO. In addition, the Eurasian major power is seen as a direct threat to the entire Europe but also to the Middle East, Africa and the Arctic and it will allegedly remain to be so without a “fundamental and deep transformation”. It follows that the Czech political representation advances a regime change in Russia as a precondition for any normalisation talks. As far as China is concerned, the Security Strategy addresses the growing assertiveness in protecting its interests. The document ascribes revisionism, military build-up,

coercion and hybrid operations against liberal democracies to Beijing and identifies China's investment in strategic areas, an important role in supply chains and potential to develop new technologies as a risk. Even though the wording is more cautious in the case of China compared to Russia, the country is addressed in the section titled "security threats and sources of instability" so the message is unambiguous.

Aside from Russia and China, other long-term threats are reportedly posed by North Korea, Iran and broader social phenomena such as terrorism, radicalism and illegal migration. Overall, the current version of the Security Strategy envisages the risk of a conflict in both traditional and new domains inclusive of cyber and outer space, not excluding the possibility of the use of nuclear and chemical weapons. Russia and Syria are accused of broking the ban on chemical weapons while Russia is blamed for her brinkmanship in nuclear weaponry which might break the "nuclear taboo". The authors fail to remember that it was the US which broke the taboo and intimidation by nuclear strikes was an integral part of the American political arsenal for a long time during the Cold War I. Last but not least, the problem of technological race is discussed. In this regard, the technological superiority of liberal democracies over "autocracies" in such fields as AI, quantum technologies, biotechnologies and autonomous systems is marked as a matter of strategic importance. It implies that both protectionism and containment are seen as legitimate tools in this game.

Security principles and interests

These are the most important features of the security environment as depicted by the principal normative document. They are interconnected with the basic security policy principles, even though the latter is defined in a somewhat blurred way. Protection of "democratic values" is on the very top but such values are described with reference to human rights and fundamental freedoms which are, however, linked to liberal constitutionalism rather than democracy which is, in essence, restricted by the imperatives of human rights. The awareness of the need for a holistic approach to security including the indivisibility of internal and external security can be assessed positively because, indeed, efficient modern governance requires a comprehensive strategy that overcomes fragmentation and departmentalism. The valid Security Strategy expands national security to new areas perceiving the economy, information and cyber space, technology, food and environment as integral parts of national security. In contrast to neoliberal policies, the state is to play an active role in mitigating

economic dependencies and protection of security interests which goes far beyond defence and military. Securitisation can be considered one of the main tendencies today irrespective of the political regime. In the case of the liberal democracies, it accelerates the transition to postliberalism which is typical of quite a wide range of authoritarian features and practices contrasting with the era of neoliberalism that is apparently over.²

Based on the description of the security environment and definition of general principles, the 2023 Security Strategy formulates concrete security interests which are divided into three categories—vital, strategic and other important interests. The first category is composed of the protection of sovereignty, territorial integrity, political independence and “democratic rule of law” (which is a somewhat strange synonym for liberal democracy). The strategic interests encompass a wide array of items: promotion of stability and rules-based international order, a strong NATO intertwined with a united EU embedded in a firm transatlantic alliance, building advanced military capabilities, safeguarding economic, information, cyber, technological, food and environmental security and last but not least protection of liberal democratic institutions. The third category specifies other important interests, that is, building bilateral relations with EU countries, the US and UK, an “independent Ukraine” integrated into Euro-Atlantic structures, developing multilayered relations with like-minded actors in Asia-Pacific, support for the UN to be a stabilising factor on the global scale, promotion of democracy, human rights, fundamental freedoms and the principles of the rule of law worldwide but also a comprehensive reform of domestic education system, digitalisation of the state and public administration, development of a strong civil society as well as suppression of extremism.

² Zemánek, L. (2023, July 1). *The Rise of Liberal Authoritarianism and Global Transition to Polycentrism*. Russia in Global Affairs. <https://eng.globalaffairs.ru/articles/global-transition-to-polycentrism/>

Conclusion

The analysis of the principles and interests laid down by the Security Strategy shows inner contradictions. The document postulates the universalism of liberal democracy, its principles, values and institutions as well as the universalism of the rules-based international order. These claims together with the global promotion of the Western model in fact undermine the central and stabilising role of the UN. The proclaimed promotion of stability is in stark contrast to the geopolitical goals in Eastern Europe and Asia-Pacific where vital interests of both Russia and China are seriously affected. Similarly, the one-sided orientation to NATO and US in conjunction with strong moralism thwarts possibilities of a pragmatic and independent foreign policy. Last but not least, meeting the set national security goals requires the implementation of authoritarian policies and measures which transform the liberal democratic model from within.