

Czechoslovakia and its Armed Forces in Times of Change

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ABSTRACT

In the 1980s Czechoslovakia was one of the strongest countries in the Warsaw Treaty Organisations in terms of military capacity. In addition to the regular army, Czechoslovakia had strong internal security forces and people's militia. The army was under the control of the Communist Party, whose extension was the political main directorate of the army.

The reorganisation of the army started in 1990. The main task was to reorganise the army of a totalitarian country into the armed forces of a democratic state. A civilian was appointed the Defence Minister; a new military doctrine was prepared, which stated that national defence was the duty of the army; the general staff and the Ministry of Defence as well as the structure of units were reorganised; reducing the number of staff started; the length of compulsory military service was shortened; and becoming a member of NATO was set as a goal.

The Soviet army units that were stationed in Czechoslovakia in 1968 were withdrawn by summer 1991. The Warsaw Treaty Organisation was disbanded at the same time. Czechoslovakia ceased to exist by the end of the subsequent year: the Czech Republic and Slovakia became independent countries that also divided the armed forces by the 2:1 principle – in favour of the Czech Republic, which is the larger of the two and has a bigger population. The Czech Republic became a member of NATO in March 1999. The number of staff of the armed forces of the Czech Republic was reduced fourfold from 1993–2013. Compulsory military service was abolished in 2005 and a professional army was introduced instead.

The period of transition from a totalitarian military into the defence forces of a democratic state in the former Czechoslovakia is still an almost unexplored part of our recent history. Not all relevant sources are accessible and not all witnesses are willing to share their knowledge. The aim of this article is to outline the main defence issues a newly developing democratic society had to tackle.

Czechoslovakia and its armed forces

For more than thirty years, the Czechoslovak People's Army (CSLA, *Československá lidová armáda*) had been a firm part of the Warsaw Treaty Organization. Its 200,000 soldiers (in wartime, reservists would increase the number to over 700,000 troops) were trained to perform a sweep attack against the territory of West Germany.

The Czechoslovak People's Army was equipped with 4,500 tanks, 2,000 armoured personnel carriers, more than 1,000 artillery systems (including short-range missiles with the possible use of conventional or nuclear warheads) and 400 combat aircraft. This huge power was subordinated to the intentions of the Soviet Union (the so-called defence of the international communist community). Czechoslovak national interests (primarily the survival of the Czech and Slovak nations) were unimportant. In the case of such a war, Czechoslovakia would probably have been annihilated.¹

Aside from the SNB (*Sbor Národní Bezpečnosti*, National Security Corps), consisting of the StB (*Státní bezpečnost*, Secret Police) and the VB (*Veřejná bezpečnost*, order police), and the People's Militias (*Lidové milice*, paramilitary troops comprising communist party members), the army was one of the direct power tools for manipulating society. The armed forces were involved in suppressing the mass demonstration of citizens on the first anniversary of Soviet occupation in August 1969. The High Command of the CSLA had been prepared to defend the regime internally.

¹ Petr Luňák, *Plánování nemyslitelného. Československé válečné plány 1950–1960* (Praha: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny Akademie Věd ČR and Dokořán, 2007), 36–71.

For decades, the military had been a traditional part of social life, but its public image progressively degraded. From an official 1987 opinion poll: “Compared to 1980, there has been a strong negative shift in rating the CSLA’s ability to ensure national defence. Currently 75% of Czechoslovak citizens consider the CSLA well equipped and prepared, but only 56% think the CSLA shows a high morale and discipline. And 20% of citizens think that the military has no support and confidence of the population.”²

It should be noted that in another survey in 1991, the decline of the population’s confidence in the army’s ability to fulfil its tasks continued. Forty-six percent of citizens had confidence in the ability of the army, 45% had no confidence and 9% did not know.³

The Communist Party of Czechoslovakia systematically created an absolute political rule in the military. The main tools serving that purpose were a huge and powerful political apparatus and a system of nomenklatura in the selection of commanders.⁴

During the Velvet Revolution in November 1989, it was unclear how the military would react to general criticism of the communist regime. From the 20th of November 1989 on, leaders of the Ministry of Defence developed an initiative for the political activation of army service members in support of communist rule. The Minister of Defence, Army General Milán Václavík, ordered the preparation of military forces for project “Response,” suppressing mass demonstrations of citizens led by a new opposition force, the Civic Forum.

Forces selected for intended intervention were on standby from the 24th of November. On the same day, at the plenary session of the Central Committee of the Communist party of Czechoslovakia, General Václavík proposed as a member of the Central Committee to place the “army” forces, police forces and the People’s Militias on standby and forcibly take over the mass media for acting against protesters, with the intention to

² “Veřejné mínění o vybraných otázkách mezinárodní politiky a obrany socialismu,” http://archiv.soc.cas.cz/download/1212/1987_4_%C4%8C%C3%A1st1.pdf (accessed 9.9.2013).

³ Army – evaluation. Survey of the Institute for Public Opinion, 1991, APS-P-ČR, Federal assembly – 6th period, files of the Committee for Defence and Security, no 15/IV.

⁴ Vladimíra Hradecka, František Koudelka, *Kádrová politika a nomenklatura KSČ 1969-1974* (Praha: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny Akademie věd ČR, 1998), 174–180.

save the weak, imploding regime. General Václavík's suggestion was met with no positive response by other Central Committee members. Leaders of the Communist Party realised there was no clear support from Moscow. The Central Committee, on the 25th of November, declared the intention not to use force, except in the case of threat to life and property and the disruption of the basis of socialism.⁵

But not many other army officers had such high communist ethics as General Václavík had. And the last point was made by the newly elected leadership of the communist party. They sent to the Army's main political administration and to the highest officers a clear political message on the 30th November 1989: "We ask you to understand with the respect to interior and international situation that we have no other possibility than only political solution of crisis."⁶

General Václavík was replaced in the post of defence minister by General Miroslav Vacek. General Vacek had a long service career, was a communist party member and was ranked a general. Before being appointed the minister, he was the Chief of General Staff of the Armed Forces. As newly appointed minister, General Vacek met Václav Havel in December 1989 and promised him that the army's neutrality would be maintained.⁷

Armed Forces in a new democratic state

The Czechoslovak People's Army did not play a tragic part in the "Velvet Revolution", but the army's position was strange. On the other hand, nevertheless, political conditions inside and outside the country changed completely. The future was totally unknown. In 1990, socialism as a political model had not yet been dismissed. Czechoslovak membership in the

⁵ Committee for Security and Defence, Army – evaluation, Report of the Commission of the president CSFR for the investigation of army activity in November 1989, APS-P-ČR-AFS, f. Federal assembly – 6th period, file no 15/IV.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Vladimír Hanzel, *Zrychlený tep dějin: Reálné drama o deseti jednáních* (Praha: Ok Centrum, 1991), 251–290.

Warsaw Pact was not officially questioned, but there was no rationale to keep such a huge military force in the new Europe.

At the beginning of 1990, the armed forces had the same role to fulfil as before: to maintain the necessary capacity for national defence and perform its tasks as a part of its membership in the Warsaw Pact. The armed forces had to struggle with troubles arising from its own existence: internal day-to-day activities and a lack of discipline.

The new democratic state had a complicated heritage to tackle. The military was too huge for the period after the Cold War. The Czechoslovak armed forces were the third largest out of the seven Warsaw Pact states. The Czechoslovakian armed forces owned the highest number of main battle tanks per capita (30 for 100,000 inhabitants) and combat air-planes (26 for 1,000,000 inhabitants). Czechoslovakia had over 14,000,000 inhabitants.⁸

In his legendary 1990 New Year's Day address, President Václav Havel claimed: "As the Commander in Chief of the armed forces, I want to guarantee that bold peace initiatives including the shortening of conscription, the establishment of alternative compulsory service and the general humanization of life in the military are preferred over alleged national defence interests."⁹

Possible external threats did not represent a major challenge for Havel. He emphasised solving the situation inside the Czechoslovak Armed Forces and possible threats for the new democracy.

The end of totalitarian regime in Czechoslovakia 1989 brought about a set of four great challenges:

- Transition of a totalitarian army into the armed forces of the democratic state
- Dissolution of the Warsaw pact
- Withdrawal of Soviet troops from the Czechoslovak territory

⁸ Army – evaluation, Materials for Conventional Armed Forces in Europe Treaty (CFE-T), APS-P-ČR, f. Federal assembly – 6th period, files of the Committee for Defence and Security, no 15/I.

⁹ Osobní stránky Václava Havla, <http://vaclavhavel.cz> (accessed 11.12.2013).

- Two years after 1990, it was necessary to deal with something that had not been anticipated at first: to divide Czechoslovakia into two independent states and divide the armed forces as well.

Transition

The first step in defence reform was to depoliticise and dismantle the political apparatus inside the military, with the top-level structure called the Main Political Directorate. This measure was considered an important tool for preventing the possible misuse of the armed forces against what was still a weak and nascent democracy. But out of the 3,164 former members of that political military apparatus, only 284 were discharged in 1990. All other officers were moved to a newly established army directorate for education and culture or into the positions of commanders or experts. So, by the mid-1990s former officers of the Main Political Directorate still held 88.8% of the positions in the newly formed Education and Culture Directorate.¹⁰

This fact aroused criticism that the armed forces were not implementing any changes. Society refused communist rule but not much changed in the military.

Army service members' own initiatives represented a completely new phenomenon. Soldiers and officers formed independent associations (interest groups) inside the armed forces. Those groups strived to have input in the changes underway in the armed forces and naturally have some influence, too. One such group was created by ex-military officers discharged from the military after the Prague Spring was crushed in 1968 and labelled as reformist ("euro communists"), popularly called "sixty-eighters". This association was called the "Military Revival" and was a part of the Civic Forum (main opposition force). There were two main tasks of

¹⁰ Summary of engaging former party apparatus members of CSLA into the sector of public education, 10.7.1990, APS-P-ČR, f. Federal assembly – 6th period, files of the Committee for Defence and Security, no 15/I.

this association: take part in changing the military into a new democratic force and rehabilitate its members.¹¹

Another initiative was called the “Legion of Freedom”. It was an ultra-radical group of young officers calling for rapid democratic changes in the armed forces. But in autumn 1990, the minister of defence abolished the Legion of Freedom for its allegedly extremist tendencies.¹²

The Parliament was very quick to enact a new democratic military oath, a new name (Czechoslovak Armed Forces) and the general principle of apolitical armed forces. At the beginning of 1990, the armed forces were to perform the following functions: to maintain their capacity for national defence but also to fulfil obligations stemming from the country’s effective membership in the Warsaw Pact.

In his order promulgated on the occasion of the 45th anniversary of the country’s liberation in May 1990, President Václav Havel stated: “Czechoslovakia wants to keep the obligations following from the Warsaw Pact’s existence as a political and military alliance recognising sovereignty and independence of member countries and an important tool of disarmament negotiations. The idea of security, democracy and overall global humanization is going to become recognized as a massive political and social power. At the forefront we see the task to struggle for a unified Europe. We want to become an integral part of such a Europe. But Europe is still divided into two blocs. There are still two huge piles of weapons in existence. The defence doctrine of Czechoslovakia accentuates the principle of sufficient defence, non-intervention into the internal processes of other countries. The main purpose of the armed forces is to defend sovereignty and the territorial integrity of our country.”¹³

The new democratic government was increasingly discontent over the slow reform effort performed by Defence Minister General Vacek. He was

¹¹ Zdeňka Kokošková, Stanislav Kokoška, *Obroda – klub za socialistickou přestavbu. Dokumenty* (Praha: Maxdorf, 1996), 149–150.

¹² Letter of the Minister of Defence to the Chairman of the Committee for Defence and Security, 16.10.1990, APS-P-ČR, f. Federal assembly – 6th period, files of the Committee for Defence and Security, no 15/I.

¹³ *Obrana lidu*, 8.5.1990, 4.



The last communist-era Defence Minister of Czechoslovakia General Milán Václavík (on the right) taking part of an army communist party meeting. The banner reads: all energy of the party and the people to fulfil the 16th communist party congress program (end of 1980s). Military History Institute in Prague

too closely tied with the totalitarian style of military leadership. In autumn 1990, the former dissident and Charter 77 member Luboš Dobrovský became the first civilian Defence Minister in 60 years. A friend of Václav Havel, Luboš Dobrovský, was nominated for a new position as guarantor of the civil administration and the democratic control of the army.

A great challenge was to define a new defence doctrine and security guarantees for the Czechoslovak Republic in turbulent times. The key word describing the doctrine was a good balance – among limited financial resources and human resources and the state's disadvantageous geographic position for national defence purposes. The Czechoslovak armed forces were to adopt a defensive, instead of offensive, posture. It was necessary for Czechoslovak security to achieve good relations with

its neighbours in Europe. The Warsaw Pact was, in reality, hollow and was burdened by painful reminiscences. Just as other countries in Europe, Czechoslovakia nevertheless strived for a new, more effective and trustworthy security system. As a temporary measure, the armed forces had to be prepared to repel any attack from any direction.

The second meeting of the State Defence Council on the 12th of November 1990 endorsed the Czechoslovak Armed Forces development concept. Consequently, the Military Doctrine of the Czechoslovak Federal Republic (CSFR) was approved in March 1991. Its principles were elaborated upon in the CSFR Comprehensive Defence Strategy and in the Operations plan of the Armed Forces' Employment for the Defence of CSFR. That policy document was authorised by President Havel on the 28th of January 1992.¹⁴

Organization of the Czechoslovak Armed Forces stemmed from the new strategic concept, stressing the defensive purpose of the military. The General Staff and the Ministry of Defence were reorganised. The changes included the reduction of personnel and armaments, the introduction of a three-echelon command system, and the adoption of a brigade structure. All those changes sought to prepare the armed forces for possible future accession to NATO.

For the previous offensive purposes under communist rule, a majority of the best-equipped forces were concentrated in the western part of the Czech lands (Bohemia) and along borders with the Federal Republic of Germany and Austria. The Slovak part of the Republic was considered the rear, far from any possible theatre of war. In Slovakia, predominantly training facilities and a few second-class equipped units were stationed. Only 18.6% of the entire personnel of the armed forces served on the territory of Slovakia.

During 1990–1992, one-third of the military units and equipment were relocated to Slovak territory. It was not only for the purpose of

¹⁴ Use of the military doctrine in legislative and other law rules of the Czechoslovak Army and the level of relocation especially in the Slovak Republic territory. Speech by the chief of the General Staff of the Czechoslovak Army, 12.2.1992, APS-P-ČR, f. Federal assembly – 6th period, files of the Committee for Defence and Security, no 15/IV.

“defence in all directions”. Subsequently, separatist tendencies grew in Slovakia.

The reduction of armed forces personnel was prepared at the same time. Instead of 200,000 soldiers, as in the communist era, the military would have only around 135,000 – 140,000 service members at the end of 1993. In the context of the CFE-T (Conventional Armed Forces in Europe Treaty) and the planned changes in force structure, phase one was designed to dispose of 1,880 tanks, 2,453 armoured carriers, 34 mobile launchers of short-range rockets and of medium-range surface-to-surface missiles, 2,335 artillery pieces, rocket launchers and mortars (calibre 100 mm and bigger), 30 mobile launchers of surface-to-air missiles and 101 combat airplanes.¹⁵

The reduction of the defence budget entailed challenges for the military. It was a reason to postpone the steps leading to the future transition from compulsory military service to a professional army. Financial resources were spent mostly on the purchase of spare parts for military vehicles. But the reduced budget did not permit the acquisition of modern equipment that would meet NATO standards. Compared to 1988, the budget was 20% lower in 1990, but the prices of materials were higher. Financing the armed forces was influenced by the release of prices, which started in January 1991. Before that, the national economy was regulated by the state. The intensity of military training fell to a minimum. In 1990–1992, the armed forces were only surviving.¹⁶

Many old commitments also restricted the development of the armed forces. In 1990, the armed forces were forced to buy new, but now useless, weapons. For example, 80 armoured carriers and six MiG-29 fighters previously contracted were procured in 1990. The government even decided to procure eighty-two T-72 tanks from a Czechoslovak manufacturer, because a foreign customer had eventually declined to buy them.

¹⁵ Propositions of government for Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty, APS-P-ČR, f. Federal assembly – 6th period, files of the Committee for Defence and Security, no 15/I, 30.1.1990.

¹⁶ Presentation by the chief of the General Staff of the Czechoslovak Army regarding the budget for 1992, APS-P-ČR, f. Federal assembly – 6th period, files of the Committee for Defence and Security, no 39/I.

But such acquisitions did not make sense with the armed forces reduced as a result of the CFE-T.¹⁷

Society regarded the humanization of the military as a major priority. In March 1990, the Parliament shortened the length of conscription from 24 to 18 months. On the 14 of March 1990, the Parliament enacted an alternative civil service for conscientious objectors. The act was not well-formulated and permitted conscripts to request alternative service at any moment without limitation. But only a few of those conscripts were true conscientious objectors. Most of the people requesting alternative service sought personal benefits. A wave of such applications initiated chaos in the armed forces. After one year, the Parliament had to revise the act and the situation improved. Notwithstanding all steps taken for the humanization of the military service, the armed forces were viewed as obscuring the real state of affairs much the same way as in the communist era. Conscripts did not accept the opportunity to serve for homeland defence with a new moral conviction. According to their opinion the army system did not change much after 1989 compared to communist era conditions.¹⁸

Withdrawal of Soviet troops from Czechoslovakia

Armies of five members of the Warsaw Pact crushed the democratisation endeavour, known as “the Prague Spring”, on the 21st of August 1968. Around 150 Czechoslovak citizens were killed during the first few weeks of the occupation. By the 4th of November 1968, Hungarian, Polish, Bulgarian and East German troops had withdrawn from Czechoslovakia. They took part in the invasion mainly for propaganda reasons. However, Soviet troops stayed in Czechoslovakia for more than twenty years. The stay of the contingent was based on the treaty made between the USSR government and the Czechoslovak government on “conditions for the temporary

¹⁷ State's closing budget for 1990, chapter of the Federal Ministry of Defence, APS-P-ČR, f. Federal assembly – 6th period, files of the Committee for Defence and Security, no 39/II.

¹⁸ Civil alternative service, APS-P-ČR, f. Federal assembly – 6th period, files of the Committee for Defence and Security, no 20.



President of the Czech Republic Václav Havel signs the document of accession to NATO (26 February 1999). Military History Institute in Prague

stationing of Soviet troops on Czechoslovak territory”, which was signed on the 16th of October 1968. The treaty permitted 75,000 Soviet soldiers of the ground forces and 200 aircraft to be stationed in the country.

The deployment of Soviet troops resulted in the relocation of about a hundred Czechoslovak military units and caused many subsequent difficulties for Czechoslovak armed forces personnel.

Many violent acts were perpetrated by the Soviet troops in Czechoslovak territory during the more than 20 years of their stay. These primarily involved traffic accidents, but naturally street brawls, rapes, robberies, black market crimes and murders occurred, too. Soviet soldiers behaved like occupiers in Czechoslovakia.¹⁹ This fact was obvious mostly in the

¹⁹ Milan Bárta, Lukáš Cvrček, Patrik Košícký, Vítězslav Sommer, *Oběti okupace. Československo 21.8.-31.12.1968* (Praha: ÚSTR, 2008), 11–16.

first few years, when the Soviet Army forcibly punished all cases in which citizens disagreed with the Soviet presence in Czechoslovakia. The Soviet army also arbitrarily seized flats and land for use as training sites. It used both Czechoslovak state property and the environment. Much groundwater was contaminated because of inappropriate construction and improper operation of oil tanks. Many accidents were caused by the Soviets driving vehicles that did not meet roadworthiness standards.²⁰

Czechoslovak citizens' feelings of annoyance surfaced, for instance following the victory of the Czechoslovak ice hockey team over the Soviet team in March 1969 and during events linked to the first anniversary of Soviet occupation in August 1969. However, legal and repressive measures taken by the state effectively diminished the amount of civil discontent expressed by the Czechoslovak people.

Political authorities of the Czechoslovak Communist Party and the armed forces continued to produce propagandistic, artificially friendly relations between civilians, the CSLA and Soviet troops. Soviet soldiers were involved in the production of or appeared on various cultural or political occasions. Seemingly, the citizens of Czechoslovakia became used to their presence.

The first act of withdrawal, however limited, stemmed from a Soviet-initiated deal announced by Mikhail Gorbachev on the 7th of December 1988. The Soviet Airborne Battalion left its location in the Lest military training area (Slovakia) in April 1989. The Standalone Road Transport Battalion and the Standalone Combat Engineer Battalion, both stationed in Olomouc, soon followed in May and June 1989. The fourth unit going back to the USSR was the Standalone Chemical Defence Battalion. The number of Soviet forces in Czechoslovakia thus decreased by 1,500 soldiers, 192 tanks and 20 combat aircraft during 1989. Additionally, the number of tanks in tank divisions and the number of armoured carriers was to decrease by 20% and 40% respectively, due to a planned reorganisation into a "force structure with defensive purposes". The withdrawal

²⁰ Files of damage incidents, VUA, f. the governmental plenipotentiary for the provisional stay of Soviet troops on the Czechoslovak territory.



Swedish JAS-39 Gripen fighter jets of the Czech Air Force. Military History Institute in Prague

was planned to finish with the withdrawal of the 31st Tank Division from the town of Bruntál by the end of 1990. However, in reality, history did not follow those plans.²¹

In November 1989, during the overthrow of communist rule, the idea to withdraw Soviet troops became one of the most important subjects for the public. A vast majority of Czechoslovak citizens wished to be rid of Soviet forces. It was regarded not only an issue of national pride but also as the removal of a possible threat to the future independent development of the country. Nevertheless, the way to fulfilling that wish was not so easy.

First Ladislav Adamec's reformed federal government reacted quickly and issued a response to the proclamation of the countries (dated 4 December 1989) that had taken part in the 1968 occupation. Warsaw Pact armies were blamed for breaking the rules of international law. Adamec's government suggested starting negotiations on an "inter-

²¹ Jindřich Pecka, *Sovětská armáda v Československu, 1968–1991: chronologický přehled* (Praha: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR, 1996), 139.

national treaty regarding the temporary deployment of Soviet forces in Czechoslovakia. The effort aimed at involving the Central Group of Soviet Forces in a global process of the disarmament of superpowers". As a result, the withdrawal of Soviet forces would be included in negotiations over the reduction of Soviet and American forces in Europe. On the other hand, that scenario would in fact legalize the presence of Soviet forces in Czechoslovakia as a part of a joint defence system. Not even the Soviet Union had requested such a statement before. According to Adamec's dangerous interpretation, an expert group of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Czechoslovakia started to work on a new treaty regarding the stay of Soviet forces.²²

In contrast, the Civic Forum requested immediate withdrawal. Things started to progress according to the wishes of the nation when Marián Čalfa's completely new government was constituted on the 10th of December 1989.

The first round of Czechoslovak-Soviet negotiations took place in Prague, from the 15th to the 17th of January, 1990. Despite the efforts of the Soviets to maintain their foreign forces in Czechoslovakia and to keep the negotiations exclusively on a formal level, they finally accepted the demand for withdrawal by 1991.

The second negotiation round took place in Moscow on the 7th of February 1990. The Soviets did not concede the nullification of the original treaty of 1968. Therefore the Czechoslovak delegation used arguments based on the proclamation of the Soviet government dated the 4th of December 1989, stating that the occupation was against international law. By the end of June 1991 the withdrawal was agreed to be finished.²³

On the 26th of February 1990, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union signed a government-to-government agreement on the "Withdrawal of Soviet Troops from Czechoslovak Territory" in Moscow. By the 30th of June 1991, a total of 73,500 soldiers

²² Jaroslav Šedivý, *Černínský palác v roce nula. Ze zákulisí polistopadové zahraniční politiky* (Praha: Ivo Železný, 1997), 46.

²³ Jindřich Pecka, *Odsun sovětských vojsk z Československa 1989–1991* (Praha: ÚSD AV ČR, 1996), 99.



Czech soldiers on a mission in Afghanistan. Military History Institute in Prague

with their 39,000 family members and relatives, 1,220 tanks, 2,500 armoured carriers, 105 combat airplanes, 175 helicopters and 95,000 tons of ammunition had left Czechoslovakia. The last train transport crossed the Czechoslovak borders on the 21st of June 1991. Commander of the Central Group of Soviet Forces Colonel General Eduard Vorobyov flew back home on the 27th of June 1991.²⁴

The Central Group of Soviet Forces abandoned 355 buildings, 286 in the Czech Republic and 69 in the Slovak Republic. Soviet troops left behind extensive ecological damage throughout the country.²⁵

²⁴ Major General ing. Svetozár Nađovič, Major General Hartmut Foertsch, Major General Imre Karáczony, Major General Zdisław Ostrowski, *The Great Withdrawal* (Bratislava: Ministry of Defence of the Slovak Republic, 2005), 56–57.

²⁵ Pecka, *Odsun sovětských*, 260–280.

Dissolution of the Warsaw Pact

The dissolution of the Warsaw Pact was recognised as the third important challenge. The Warsaw treaty was considered by Czechoslovak citizens as a symbol of Soviet occupation in 1968 and long subordination of the country to Soviet interests. The planned military conflict between West and East would completely destroy the country and annihilate the nation.

The political changes that took place in Europe during the 1980s and 1990s had great historical importance. Soviet forces left Hungary and Czechoslovakia. In the early 1990s, US military intelligence concluded the Warsaw Pact did not pose an offensive threat for NATO anymore. The intelligence's conclusions were based on analyses of ongoing political changes in the respective Warsaw Pact countries and the fact that the countries had clearly politically diverged from the Soviet Union. However, the Warsaw Pact still remained a complicated political group and its natural dissolution was also accelerated by the course of events in the Western Bloc. In October 1991, Germany was reunified and joined NATO.

The process of the gradual dissolution of the Warsaw Pact was complicated and thus its final outcome could not be predicted in advance. It was feared that the dissolution might lead to dangerous instability in the Soviet Union or Europe.

Soviet Minister of Foreign Affairs Eduard Shevardnadze even made attempts to save the pact during a meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Warsaw Pact in Prague on the 17th of March 1990. He did succeed to an extent, and so the Warsaw Pact continued to exist for a limited period of time, which helped to prevent a security vacuum in Europe.²⁶

As a result of political initiatives by Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland, the remaining Warsaw Pact representatives agreed on the progressive reduction of military activities at a meeting in Moscow in June 1990.

Efforts leading towards the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact became more intensive due to worries regarding the intervention of Soviet forces

²⁶ Šedivý, *Černínský palác*, 125.

in the Baltic states in 1990–1991 and the generally unstable situation in the Soviet Union. Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Czechoslovakia, Poland and Hungary announced their intention to dissolve the Warsaw Pact by the end of 1991. All military structures and authorities were dismantled by the 31st of March 1991.

The top representatives of the Warsaw Pact countries signed the protocol for the pact's dissolution on the 1st of June 1991.²⁷

The Soviet Union's wave of internal crises culminated in the dissolution of the Soviet Union in December 1991.

Division of the states

In 1992, Czechoslovakia was divided into two independent states. The Czechoslovak Armed Forces had to separate its weapons and property between the new Czech Armed Forces and the Slovak Armed Forces by the end of December 1992. The Czechoslovak military was divided without incident. It goes without saying that the division of the state was an emotional moment. Czechoslovakia's division had previously been inconceivable for citizens and soldiers alike. But the division of the country was a political reality. The Armed Forces of the Czech Republic officially came into being on the 1st of January 1993 after the dissolution of the Czechoslovak Federation.

The separation of the states was realized on the basis of Act No 542/1992 Sb. on the abolishment of the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic on the 31st of December 1992. The Czechoslovak Armed Forces were abolished by the same token. From the 1st of January 1993, units and facilities of the former Czechoslovak Armed Forces were integrated on the territorial principle into the Armed Forces of the Czech Republic and the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic. The Minister of Defence issued the formal order on the 21st of December 1992. All commanders were

²⁷ Zdeněk Matějka, "Jednání o rozpuštění Varšavské smlouvy," *Historie a vojenství* 3, no 54 (2005): 4–19.

ordered to complete a handover of materials until midnight of the 31st of December 1992.²⁸

The principle key for the division of property was a 2:1 ratio in favour of Czech lands, as the Czech Republic had a bigger territory and more inhabitants.

Two new states endeavoured on their path of independence without any complaints or controversy. Many soldiers of Slovak nationality chose to serve in the Czech armed forces and some Czechs the other way around.

Dissolution of the Warsaw Pact opened questions about the future orientation of Czechoslovak Republic's defence policy. The Czech Republic could engage with the Western European military forces of the North Atlantic Alliance, or alternatively, it could declare neutrality. Integration with NATO was chosen as the most reliable approach, ensuring the acceptance by defensive and political structures of the democratic world. The process of accession to NATO began. The quest for international guarantees of the security of the state continued into the period of the independent Czech Republic. Several alternative scenarios, which were thoroughly discussed, came into consideration. The next step would be incorporation of the country into international security structures.

The Armed Forces of Czech Republic officially came into being on the 1st of January 1993 after the Czechoslovak Federation was dissolved. Its organization stemmed from a brand new strategic concept for the Czech Republic, stressing the defensive purpose of respective forces and services. Independent military jurisdiction with military courts for the offences of soldiers and officers and military prosecutor's offices were abolished; the General Staff and the Ministry of Defence underwent reorganisation. Further, the changes included: the reduction of personnel strength and armaments, the introduction of a three-echelon command system, and the adoption of a brigade structure for the armed forces. All those changes aimed to prepare the armed forces for accession to NATO.

²⁸ Realization of institutional law no 542/1992 about the termination of the Czech and Slovak Federational Republic in the conditions of the Czechoslovak Army, 21.12.1992, VUA, collection of the Orders of the Defence Minister 1992, no 004.

In 1993, the Czech Republic became a member of the North Atlantic Cooperation Council. The Czech Armed Forces started to participate in military exercises with the armed forces of the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and France.

In 1994, the Czech Republic joined the “Partnership for Peace” program. Czech soldiers started to take part in other international military exercises and enrolled in military schools abroad. Consequently, the Czech Republic was invited for initial negotiations on NATO accession during the NATO summit in Madrid in June 1997.

An important milestone for the Czech Republic was when the Czech Republic acceded to NATO – on March 12th, 1999. And on 16 March 1999, there was a flag raising ceremony at NATO Headquarters in Brussels in honour of the new member nations, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland, officially joining NATO. That moment marked the completion of the accession period.

Another phase began to bring the armed forces up to the standards of compatibility and interoperability with other NATO Allies.

Table 1. Personnel strength of the Czechoslovak (Czech) Armed Forces 1989–2013²⁹

Year (1st January)	Officers and noncommissioned officers (from 2005 only professional personnel including rank and file)	Conscripts	Civil employees	Total
1989 (communist era)	61,405	148,595	80,000	210,000 + 80,000
1990 (new state)	56,000			198,150
1993 (Czech Republic)	38,049	68,630	25,286	131,965
2005 (professionalisation)	22,145	0	17,288	39,433
2013	21,733	0	8,288	30,021

²⁹ Personnel Size of the Defence Department in 1993–2013, <http://www.army.cz/en/facts-file/personnel-size/personnel-size-at-the-defence-department--in-1993---2011-51638/> (accessed 1.7.2014).

The armed forces transitioned to a professional army in 2005. It gained the characteristics of an advanced military force capable of tackling new threats and actively engaging in alliance operations. Without conscripts, the armed forces became much smaller with only 39,433 service members, including civil employees. The number of professional soldiers has not changed too much since; only the number of civilians working for the military has dropped.

The Czech Armed Forces today is based on the principle of the smallest possible force sufficient for defence as an operational force. There are presently 21,733 men and women in uniform serving with the Czech Armed Forces and 8,288 civilians, totalling 30,021. Nevertheless, there are also units of the active reserve component, too. The Czech armed forces now have only 123 tanks, 501 armoured combat vehicles (armoured personnel carriers and armoured infantry fighting vehicles), 182 artillery pieces with a calibre of 100 millimetres and above, 39 combat airplanes and 24 combat helicopters. The quantity of these weapons is deeply under the limits stipulated by the 1990 Conventional Armed Forces in Europe Treaty.³⁰

In NATO, the Czech contribution primarily specialises in defence against weapons of mass destruction. The standards achieved by the Czech Armed Forces in this niche specialisation are internationally considered rather high. Other such special activity is field medical service. The national economy nevertheless determines strict limits and the defence budget has declined over the last twenty years. Today, defence appropriations represent only 1.08 percent of the gross domestic product.³¹

Since its establishment, the Czech Armed Forces have taken part in many foreign missions under the flags of the UN and NATO. Over the last twenty years, the Czech Armed Forces proved its combat capabilities on foreign deployed operations. Its first operations were Desert Shield and Desert Storm in 1990–1991 in Kuwait. Since then, the Czechoslovak

³⁰ According to the CFE-T, the Czech Armed Forces is obliged to have up to 957 tanks, 1,367 armoured combat vehicles, 767 artillery systems, 230 combat airplanes and 50 combat helicopters.

³¹ Defence Budget, <http://www.army.cz/scripts/detail.php?id=5760> (accessed 1.7.2014).

and Czech Armed Forces have taken part in 32 operations abroad. More than 20,000 Czech soldiers have been deployed for missions and operations in the former Yugoslavia, Kuwait, Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan and Chad.³²

As part of the NATO Integrated Air Defence System, a task force comprising JAS 39 Gripen supersonic fighters of 211th Tactical Squadron provided defence and protection of Baltic States airspace twice in 2008–2009 and 2012 – January 2013. The Czech Air Force contingents were located in Lithuania.³³

Conclusion

The key issues relating to the armed forces in Czechoslovakia (Czech Republic) were not the creation of new forces. The main challenge was to restructure the totalitarian army into the modern armed forces of a democratic state. And the second challenge was to devise new security guarantees in a quickly changing world.

Twenty years after 1993, the security of our country is ensured in the best manner in the history of the state since 1918. On the other hand, the Czech Armed Forces and the Ministry of defence are facing budget cuts and troubles with transparency in the use of financial resources. But the confidence of citizens in their armed forces is relatively high. Czech society already recognises the armed forces as a useful and necessary tool. Not only during a typical war conflict, but also during disasters and so forth. Participation in foreign deployed operations cooperation with NATO allies furnishes the Czech Armed Forces with many valuable lessons and much experience.

³² Foreign Operations, <http://www.army.cz/scripts/detail.php?id=5807> (accessed 1.7.2014).

³³ History of Czech Military Participation in Operations Abroad (1990–2013), <http://www.army.cz/scripts/detail.php?id=5717> (accessed 1.7.2014).

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