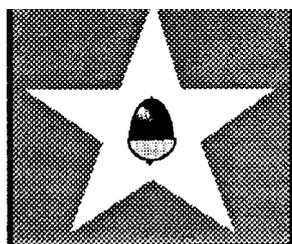


Conflict Studies Research Centre

**Ivan Gabal, Lenka Helsusova
& Thomas S Szayna**

The Impact of NATO Membership in the Czech Republic: Changing Czech Views of Security, Military & Defence

March 2002



G107(S)

Contents

Introduction	2
The Root Causes of Czech Problems in Adjusting to NATO	2
Research Goals	3
Security Perceptions in the Context of NATO Membership	4
Figure 1: Does the Czech Republic face any external threat?	4
Figure 2: Perception of origin of potential threat	4
Evolution of Perceptions of Security	5
Security in the Context of Current Problems & Priorities	5
Figure 3: Seriousness of problems facing the Czech Republic	6
Figure 4: Which institutions can assist the development of the Czech Republic?	6
Defence Against Armed Aggression	7
Figure 5: Trust in institutions in case of aggression against the Czech Republic	7
Historical Experience with Defence	7
Personal Willingness to Take Part in Defending the Country	8
Figure 6: What would you do in case of an aggression against the Czech Republic?	8
Attitudes Toward the Czech Armed Forces	9
Table 1: Trust in NATO, the military & other Czech Institutions	9
Contemporary Image of the Military in the Czech Republic	9
Views on the Preferred Shape of the Czech Armed Forces	10
Defence Spending	11
Czech Membership in NATO	12
Perceptions of Positive & Negative Aspects of NATO Membership	12
Figure 7: Positive aspects of NATO membership	13
Figure 8: Problematic aspects of Czech membership in NATO	14
Perceptions of How the Czech Republic Should Act in NATO	14
Figure 9: How active should the Czechs be in NATO?	15
Czech Behaviour During Operation Allied Force	15
Czech Views on NATO's Adaptation & Contemporary Role in International Security	16

Are the Czechs "Free Riders" in NATO?	17
Which Countries do the Czechs Trust the Most?	18
Figure 10: Czech reliance on assistance from specific allies in case of crisis	19
Czech Attitudes Toward the Further Enlargement of NATO	19
Figures 11: Which countries do you consider as eligible candidates for possible NATO membership in the next decade?	20
Conclusions	21

The Impact of NATO Membership in the Czech Republic: Changing Czech Views of Security, Military & Defence

Ivan Gabal, Lenka Helsusova & Thomas S Szayna

This paper examines the impact of the Czech Republic's accession to NATO on the views of the Czech public toward security and defence issues. The findings are based on a comprehensive questionnaire administered in 2000-01 to a random sample of over 1000 Czech adults.

The main findings are that the Czechs value and support the security that NATO membership offers. The perception of full security has strengthened the willingness of the Czechs to invest in national defence and to modernize their military. Two-thirds of the public recognizes that effective membership in NATO entails a well-performing Czech military that is integrated fully in NATO. The Czech public has a good understanding of the military's problems and is ready to support fundamental military reform, including increases in the defence budget, with the caveat that the money should not be wasted.

Even though the Czechs are highly critical of the current state of the Czech military, they retain a high level of trust in the armed forces. On the other hand, the Czechs show a high level of dissatisfaction with the performance of Czech political and constitutional bodies and they are sceptical of their effectiveness in time of crisis.

Strong support for NATO is linked to the awareness of shared responsibility and the commitment to assist allies in time of need. However, the Czechs have not fully internalized the meaning of non-Article 5 alliance operations. Without a clear knowledge of the connection between NATO's peace operations and European security, and lacking a public debate on such issues, most Czechs interpreted NATO's Operation Allied Force as a relapse into Cold War patterns of behaviour and an aggression by a military alliance against a sovereign country.

The main source of Czech hesitation toward NATO is a perception of a low level of influence that the public has on decision-making in security issues. The lack of transparency and public debate in the Czech decision to join NATO, exemplified by the lack of a referendum on the issue, is the main source of the problem. In other words, shortcomings in the democratic process in the Czech Republic continue to affect Czech attitudes and behaviour toward NATO. This is a most pertinent lesson regarding the anticipated next round of enlargement.

Introduction

The Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary joined NATO in 1999, in the alliance's first round of post-Cold War enlargement. Their accession represents a milestone in their integration into the trans-Atlantic community and a recognition by the long-standing NATO members that they had made a successful transition in establishing democratic political systems and market economies.

Nevertheless, the Czech Republic's first two years of membership in NATO have had more than their share of problems. The Czech Republic has had difficulties fulfilling its obligations toward the alliance (meeting the agreed force goals) and managing its new international position. Just like the other two new members, the Czechs have faced daunting problems in proceeding with the process of restructuring a Soviet-type military into an organization compatible with the major alliance members and capable of operating well in an alliance framework. But, differentiating the Czechs from the Poles and Hungarians, some foreign and security policies of the Czech Republic have seemed at times to dissent from NATO and have introduced doubts within NATO about the Czech Republic's reliability as an alliance member. These specifically Czech behavioural patterns have root causes in the attitudes of Czech citizens toward their armed forces and NATO and the peculiarities of the Czech domestic situation.

The Root Causes of Czech Problems in Adjusting to NATO

The uninspiring Czech performance as a NATO member can be traced to the lack of a public debate regarding defence and military issues in the Czech Republic in general and, more specifically, about Czech responsibilities as a NATO member. Prior to accession, polls showed that Czech public support for membership was among the lowest of the ten countries aspiring to membership.¹ The way the process of accession unfolded only compounded the initial hurdle of low approval. Czech officials and politicians prepared, negotiated, and implemented the entire process, with little public involvement or debate. Right up until the NATO summit in 1997 (when they were invited to become members), the public had a low level of knowledge regarding the responsibilities that came with membership. The conventional wisdom in the Czech Republic is that low public involvement in the process was no accident.² Based on a widespread opinion among Czech politicians that Czech citizens have a passive or even a negative view toward military issues, national defense and alliances, some Czech politicians deliberately did not wish to "irritate" the public by discussing the possibility of joining NATO and wanted to keep a "low profile" in the question of NATO membership. Their goal was not to overcome the low level of public support by pushing the bar higher, but to crawl under it. Moreover, both of the main political parties shared this view. The main reason for the lack of a referendum on NATO membership stemmed from the doubts among the elite about the public voting in favour of NATO. Even though the opposition social-democrats included a promise of a referendum in their election campaign in mid-1998, they failed to carry through their promise after winning the elections. In turn, the recurring doubts of the ruling (until mid-1998) liberal economists regarding the utility of defence spending kept domestic discussion about NATO membership at the level of financial cost-benefit arguments.

The elite's reluctance to engage in a public debate on the issue had some justification: the 40 years of communist rule had eliminated any semblance of an independent community of civilian security and defence experts. Consequently,

The Impact of NATO Membership in the Czech Republic

there were few politicians or security experts in the Czech Republic who could articulate the content of NATO membership and its requirements in the areas of military reform and security policy. Expertise remained limited to a group of military and civilian personnel at the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Defence. In turn, these people had neither a reason nor any obvious mechanism for making NATO membership a subject of wider debate.

Some of the unpleasant "surprises" for NATO stem from NATO's simplified view of the new states as constituted exclusively of politicians and officials with whom NATO officials interact. The new members are democracies, still in the consolidation stage of their political systems. They have democratic mechanisms in place but they are still working out the intricacies of democratic norms and practice. The involvement of the public in important debates of national security is not a given in such states.

The low level of public support for NATO membership in the Czech Republic had led to an unflattering image of the country among some of the long-standing NATO members (especially the United States) as a likely low contributor to NATO. Czech behaviour during NATO's Operation Allied Force against Yugoslavia in 1999 strengthened that image further. The Czech Republic was divided along social and political lines, even within the highest state institutions. A majority of the population opposed the operation³ and many officials of the government as well as members of the opposition tried to distance themselves from responsibility for NATO's decisions. A lack of consensus at the highest levels of the Czech representative bodies persisted throughout the entire Operation. Even though the Czech Republic eventually fell in line with NATO, Czech behaviour had cast doubts upon the loyalty and reliability of the country as a NATO member and exposed the deficiencies of the country's security and political decision-making mechanisms.

Research Goals

Some of the lack of public support for Operation Allied Force has basis in the historically rooted sympathy of Czechs toward Yugoslavia. But the deeper causes of Czech indecisiveness may lie in the lack of interest toward issues of defence and security. If that is the case, then in its mindset the Czech public may have remained outside the alliance. Or, potentially even more worrisome for NATO, the Czech public and politicians have succeeded in joining the alliance but may not be willing to make a contribution to collective defence. If that is indeed the case, then an analysis of the Czech public's view of the alliance is also important from the standpoint of deciding which post-communist countries to bring into the alliance in the future.

This paper presents the results of a research project undertaken to examine the extent to which the Czech public identifies with its responsibilities as an alliance member. The project was prepared in the autumn of 2000. The topic was examined in a standardized sociological survey based on a questionnaire submitted to a random sample of 1001 adult respondents and completed in face-to face interviews. Altogether, the survey consisted of 71 questions and six topic areas.

Security Perceptions in the Context of NATO Membership

The basic finding from the surveys is that an overwhelming majority of Czechs (almost 90%) currently feel secure from external threat. This corresponds with expert assessments of the Republic's current international geopolitical position and shows sensible perceptions among the Czech public. Older people and those who disapprove of Czech membership in NATO are more likely to be concerned about potential dangers. Those who approve of Czech membership (predominantly those with high-school education or higher) tend to feel secure.

Figure 1: Does the Czech Republic face any external military threat? (%)

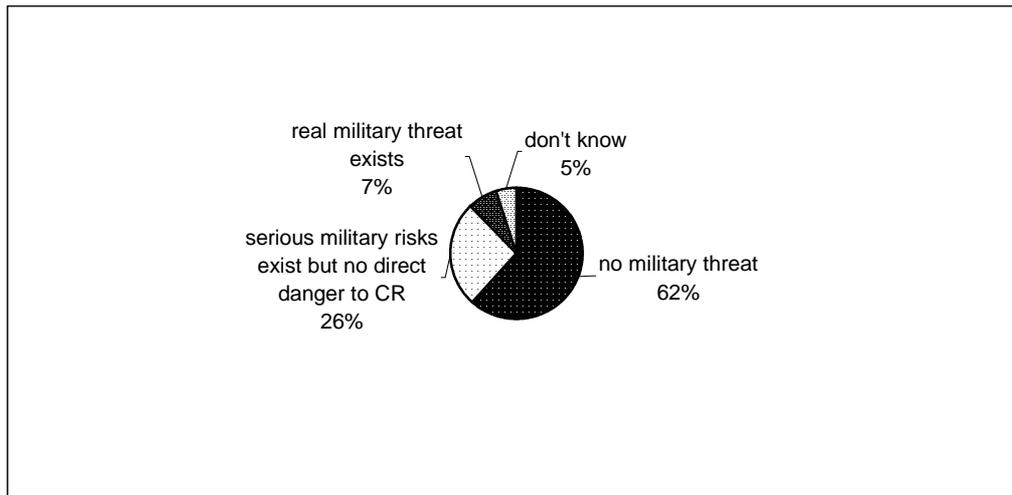


Figure 2: Perception of origin of potential threat (unprompted answers, %)

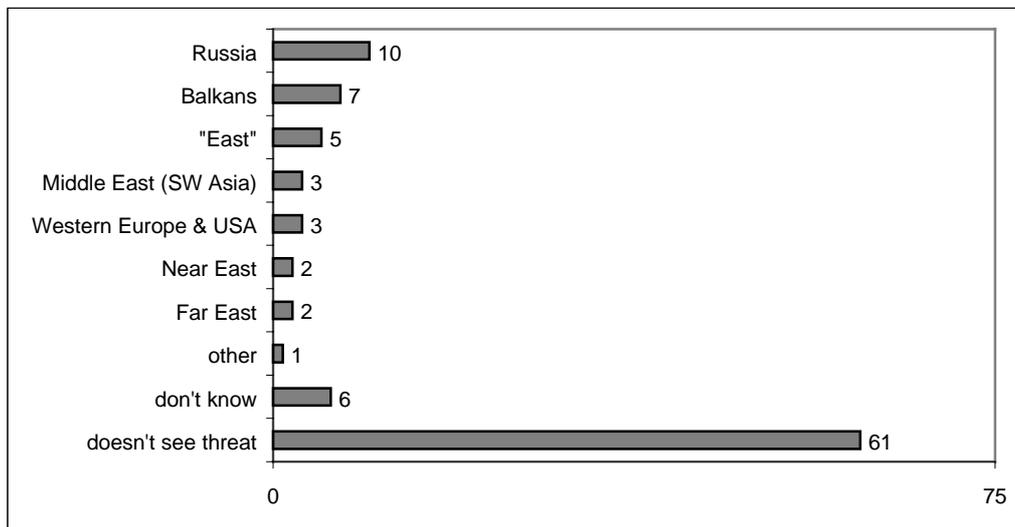


Figure 2 indicates that, as members of NATO, the Czechs do not suffer from any exaggerated anti-Russian attitudes. Viewed from inside NATO, Russia appears much less threatening than from the position of being non-aligned (1993-99).⁴

Evolution of Perceptions of Security

Accession to NATO led to the most pronounced shift in perceptions of security. From its 1989-98 average of 30%, the feeling of “full security” grew to 60% upon membership in NATO. The magnitude of the shift is enormous. Taking the rationale for NATO enlargement at its face value, namely the enlargement of the area of security and stability into central Europe in order to allow the central European countries to focus on their economic and political aspects of the post-communist transition, the data here indicate that enlargement was indeed successful, at least in the perceptions of the citizens of the Czech Republic.

However, not all Czech citizens perceive NATO membership as an ideal security solution. There are two surprisingly large groups of people who are quite resistant to the change in the Czech Republic’s international security alignment. Approximately one quarter of the respondents (27%) felt secure in both the Warsaw Pact and NATO, while another quarter (25%) did not feel secure in either of them. This latter category used the survey to express their negative attitude toward the overall evolution of the Czech Republic. They are opposed to the direction in which the country is developing and they are passive as to their own participation in the country’s defence. They view NATO as an organization that has remained virtually unchanged since the end of the Cold War. They are sceptical toward any military alliance and do not consider the joining of an alliance as a solution to the country’s security problem, preferring to rely on the country’s own defence capabilities.

Security in the Context of Current Problems & Priorities

Czech citizens perceive membership in NATO more in terms of a geopolitical shift toward the West than accession to an organization focused on collective military defence. Consequently, they see NATO responsibilities more in terms of the country’s preparations for EU membership than as augmenting their armed forces or preparing a defence against an external threat. They view NATO and EU as the twin pillars of the future direction of the Czech Republic.

The Czech public still sees the country in a period of transformation. Ten years after the ouster of the communist regime the economic and political pillars of the communist system are gone. However, many elements of the market economy and a functioning democratic political system remain under construction. This fact plays a decisive role in determining the public’s view of all other areas and problems. The main concerns of the Czech citizens are the status of the economy, the malfunctioning of the state administration, and shortcomings in law and order.

Czechs place NATO in the lowest position on the scale of international institutions that can help in assisting the Czech Republic’s future development. The placement stems from a high level of security and the high intensity of other problems facing the country compared to those related to defence and security. Interestingly, nearly one quarter of respondents (23%) were unable to determine which international organization is the most important. This is unusual, considering the fact that the Czech Republic is currently strongly defined by its international context.

The high priority accorded to the EU corresponds to the acceleration of Czech preparations for accession, and the hopes that Czech society has in connection with this. Accession to the EU entails a whole series of adjustments and problems that make life difficult for many Czechs on a daily basis. Moreover, Czech preparations

for accession mean that the influence of the EU is already visible in many important areas of state administration. Czechs already take security for granted and as a context for other concerns, which are primarily economic and social.

Figure 3: Seriousness of problems facing the Czech Republic (very serious, somewhat serious, %)

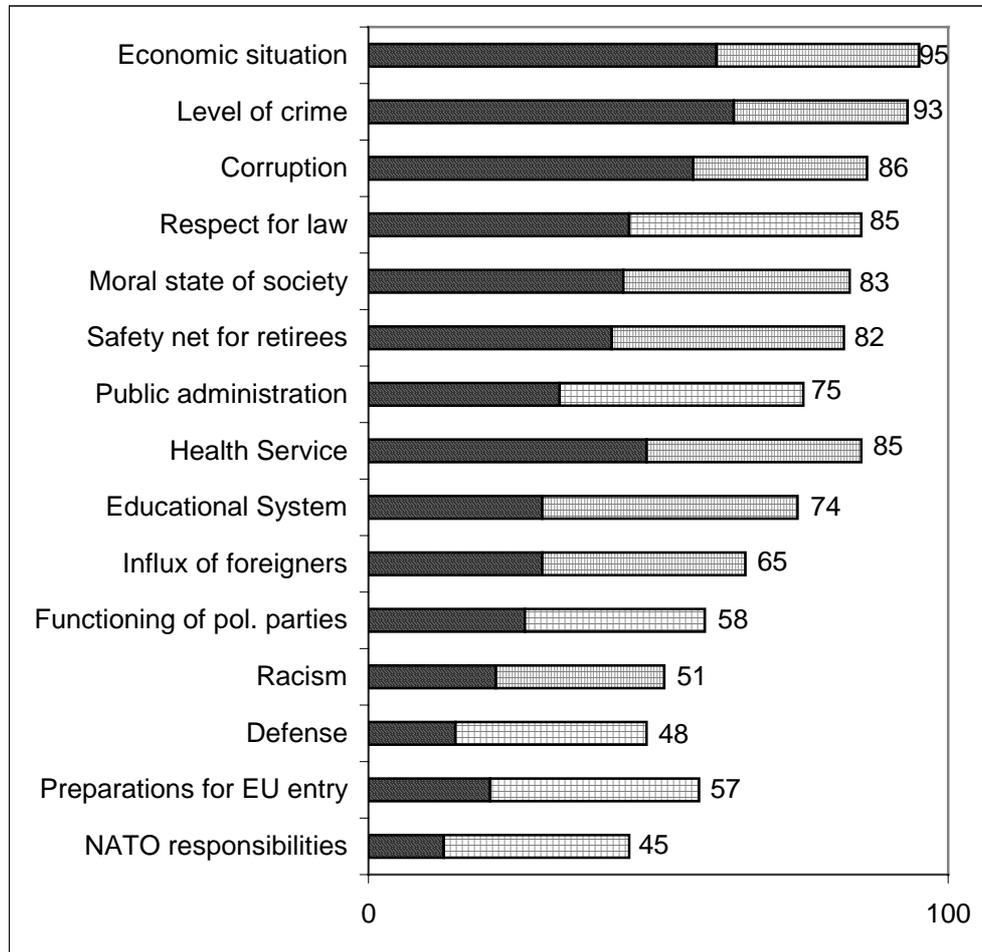
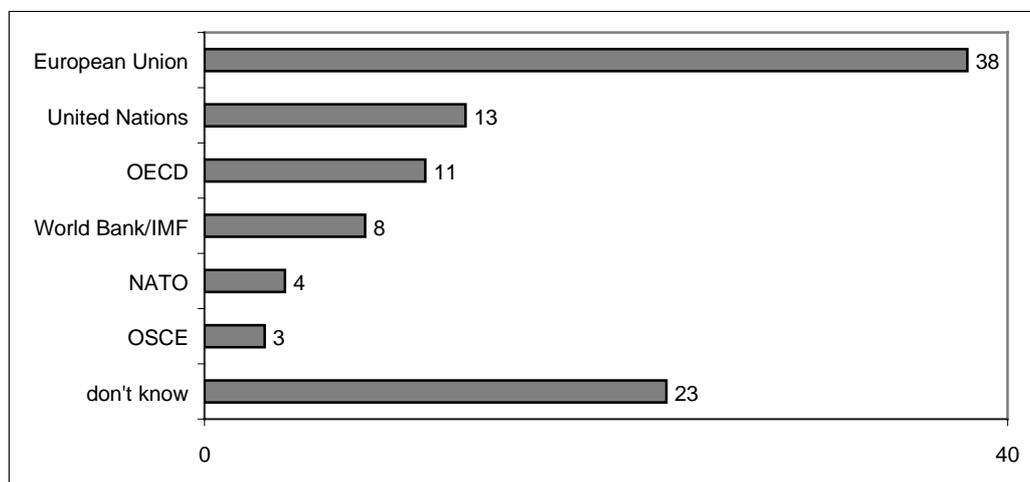


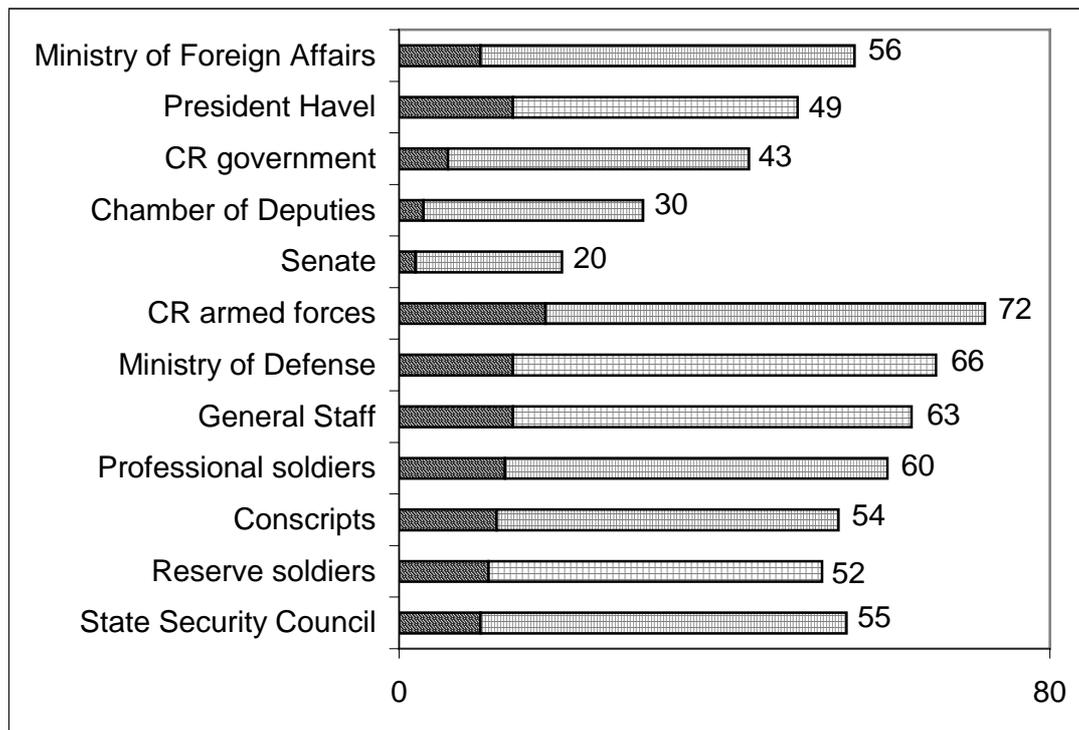
Figure 4: Which institutions can assist the development of the Czech Republic? (%)



Defence Against Armed Aggression

There are various historical myths, based on interpretations of Czech modern history, about the supposed unwillingness and inability of the Czechs to defend themselves. But what are the real Czech attitudes toward defending their country?

Figure 5: Trust in institutions in case of aggression against the Czech Republic (definitely trust, somewhat trust, %)



Institutions responsible for defence and security have the trust of Czech citizens and they are perceived independently from political institutions. When it comes to the question of crisis management, the military currently has a higher level of trust among citizens than political and constitutional institutions. The finding is interesting since the military had been seen for a long time as a tool of the communist regime usable against the citizens. This confidence in the military is related strongly to the country's membership in NATO.

Historical Experience with Defence

Czechoslovakia was the target of military aggression on two occasions during the 20th century. The first experience took place in 1938-39. Abandoned by its allies (who then took an active role in negotiating its dismemberment), in 1938 Czechoslovakia submitted to German pressure and gave up the outlying mountainous areas of Bohemia and Moravia (Sudetenland) without armed resistance, despite having a modern and highly capable military, an extensively developed system of prepared defences in the contested territory, and popular willingness to resist aggression. The second aggression was in 1968, when the Warsaw Pact crushed the Prague Spring, and popular will to resist was not matched by the state representatives, who surrendered or worked with the invading forces.

There are important differences in Czech perceptions of the appropriateness of resisting aggression, depending on whether the question refers to 1938 or 1968. Nearly two-thirds of respondents (64%) believe that Czechoslovakia should have resisted aggression in 1938. Only a slight majority of respondents (51%) feels the same way about 1968. Interestingly, those who think that the Czechs should have resisted on both occasions also state more frequently their personal willingness to take part in defending the country in the future.

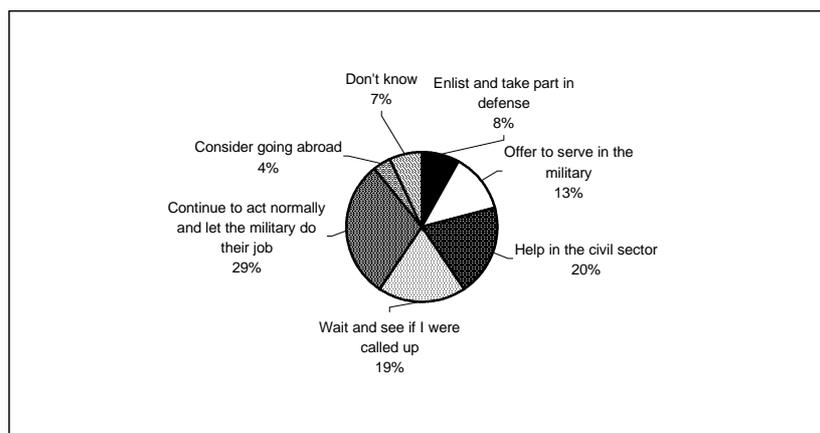
It is also important to note that the occupation of 1938-39 has become part of Czech national history, as the majority of Czechs today were born after that period. The group that experienced directly the aggression in 1968 is much larger. The higher level of optimism toward the possibility of armed defence in 1938 is probably also the result of the glorification of this period, due to its historical remoteness.

An overwhelming majority of Czech citizens think it is important not to forget the period of occupation (71%). A portion of the respondents views the negative historical experience as a warning for the future. The perception of a need to recall the harsh experiences does not impede people's motivation to defend the country and is not an expression of a feeling of resignation concerning its defence. On the contrary, the need to recall the period of occupation is tied to greater personal willingness to defend the country in case of an attack and also to greater trust toward Czech political and military institutions in charge of that defence.

Personal Willingness to Take Part in Defending the Country

Historical experiences aside, what are the current beliefs among Czechs regarding their own willingness to participate in the defence of the country? Altogether, 60% of the male respondents chose one of the four answers that showed willingness to serve in the armed forces and take part in defence. Since the Czech public does not associate women with military service, the majority of women respondents (53%) answered that they would "continue to behave as I did prior to the attack".

Figure 6: What would you do in case of an aggression against the Czech Republic? (males only, %)



People's conviction that the country is following the right course of development and their perceptions of security due to NATO membership have a positive effect on respondents' personal willingness to participate in defence. Thus the proposition that people are not willing to fight because they feel safe is not true. The idea that

The Impact of NATO Membership in the Czech Republic

the majority of Czechs feel that Czech security is protected through NATO membership and that they therefore do not need to be individually active in defence is also incorrect. On the contrary, Czech membership in NATO, the trust in the capacity of the state in the area of defence and the belief that the country is following the right course of development are key conditions that support people's personal motivation to participate in defending the country in a state of emergency.

Attitudes Toward the Czech Armed Forces

The Czechoslovak and then Czech armed forces have gone through a difficult period of adjustment and reform during the past decade. Dealing with a drastic change in the international security environment, major reductions in size, massive cuts in budgets, and enormous turnover in the higher ranks presented enough difficulties. These problems were compounded by the dissolution of Czechoslovakia and the splitting of the Czechoslovak military into separate Czech and Slovak armed forces. Prior to the breakup the military was a truly federal institution, in which Czechs and Slovaks were integrated in all units throughout the country. Then, after planning for national defence outside an alliance framework, the armed forces had to prepare for the country's accession to NATO and work out a plan of integration into the alliance.

Table 1: Trust in NATO, the military & other Czech Institutions (%)⁵

	12/1994	4/1997	12/1997	3/1998	12/1998	4/1999	11/1999	2/2000
Military	32	33	-	42	43	47	49	52
NATO	48	48	52	56	54	56	57	54
Police	-	25	-	33	-	37	36	40
President	82	76	70	58	58	58	56	52
Government	65	37	21	49	51	35	21	24
Parliament	45	40	25	34	49	34	30	27

Public trust in the military has grown in recent years. Because of its association with the communist regime, most Czechs had perceived it as a repressive force and a tool of the regime against its own people. This view is changing gradually and the public is beginning to perceive the military as a more trustworthy institution. Integration of the military into the NATO framework has helped with this change in perceptions. The growth of trust in the Czech military is especially striking in comparison with the trends in public trust in other institutions.

Contemporary Image of the Military in the Czech Republic

A majority of Czechs accepts their armed forces as an imperfect but adequately functioning defence organization (66%); 24% consider it is not functioning well. In the public's view, the military has not yet completed the required reform process and is still at an early stage of its transformation to achieve NATO standards and quality. The public image of the military is still based on what the armed forces will look like after the ongoing but not yet completed reform. There are interesting nuances within these outlooks. People with university degrees and those who are

critical toward the institutions responsible for defence and security are most critical of the military. Therefore, they are criticizing not just the military (its leadership and soldiers) but also the political and constitutional institutions in charge of defence and security. They are also critical of excessive military spending and believe that the Czechs should not forget the historical experiences of foreign occupation.

Almost one third of respondents (28%) consider “obsolete equipment” to be the greatest problem currently faced by the Czech armed forces.⁶ The response corresponds to the frequently voiced hope that Czech membership in NATO could help the improvement of the Czech military in this area. Another 16% considered the military’s outdated infrastructure as the most pressing problem. “Poor management of funds” represents another important source of concern (23%) and indicates the public’s perception that budgetary problems are not solely responsible for the obsolescence of the military’s equipment. During the past decade, Czech media have discussed widely the incidents of corruption and incompetence in the Ministry of Defence, at least as they have accompanied the armed forces’ acquisition and modernization processes.

The respondents who felt that obsolete equipment was the military’s biggest problem also felt that the military is functioning well and that it should be given more money. Interestingly, even those people who see poor management of funds as the primary problem in the military show trust toward the leadership of the military. These respondents believe that the Czech military should focus on territorial defence, it should be based on mandatory conscription, and it should not be high in cost. They are against increases in the defence budget, advocating instead better financial management using existing resources.

Views on the Preferred Shape of the Czech Armed Forces

Most Czechs see the military’s future in its full integration into NATO’s collective defence, in its professionalization and modernization. They are prepared to support higher military spending if the military fulfils their expectations of a well-functioning organization and if the additional funds are not wasted. The majority of Czechs currently give the military carte blanche to complete its own radical reform to meet NATO standards.

There are two principal opinions regarding the future shape of the Czech military. According to the first opinion, which is dominant, the military should be fully professional (62%) and integrated in the system of NATO’s collective defence (59%), achieving higher standards at higher financial costs (53%). The second insists on a conscript-based military (33%), which would have lower standards and cost less (34%). Proponents of the second option are more frequently critical of poor management in the military.

Respondents’ support for Czech membership in NATO reflects an overall positive evaluation of the development of Czech society. As other characteristics of these respondents indicate (younger, better educated, urban, and with a higher professional position), it is an attitude of those who are more satisfied in society and who enjoy a better standard of living. This same group also considers the lack of respect for law and the high crime rate to be the country’s most pressing problems.

Defence Spending

In 2000, the Czech Republic's defence budget amounted to 2.2% of its Gross Domestic Product, slightly above the NATO average. Almost half (45%) consider the current level of defence spending to be sufficient. One quarter (24%) think that more money should be allocated for the defence budget. Less than one fifth (18%) believe that the defence budget is too high. The responses show that Czechs do not perceive Czech membership in NATO as an inexpensive way to gain the advantages of security and defence protection. They are willing to pay for defence even though they feel that the country suffers from more pressing problems in other areas.

Those who are willing to increase the defence budget are also more engaged when it comes to other security issues. They agree that NATO should be involved in "out-of-area" operations and they think that the Czech Republic should assume maximum responsibility in NATO. They want the military to be integrated into NATO's collective defence, professional, and with higher standards at a higher cost. However, willingness to support higher defence budgets depends heavily on the fulfilment of expectations. These include the citizens' hope that the military will transform quickly, aspire to achieve the standards of other NATO member countries, and satisfy its preferred image - a high-performing, fully functioning, reliable, modern, and professional organization.

The decision calculation of citizens regarding military spending is a result of a simple formula in which the fulfilment of each component is necessary for public approval for defence spending: 1) membership in NATO; 2) integration in NATO's collective defence; 3) professional performance and status of the military; 4) good quality and transparent management of the existing resources.

Czech Membership in NATO

Prior to NATO's 1997 invitation to the Czech Republic, public support for membership had ranked among the lowest of all the candidate countries. In September 1998, surveys showed the level of support to range from 55-61%. Support for NATO membership has increased since Czech accession to NATO, to 70% by the end of 2000.

The decision to focus Czech defence policy toward NATO was taken by the political elites, without much public debate, participation, or dissemination of information about the responsibilities that come with membership in the alliance. As a result, only one third of the respondents identify with NATO in the sense of having a sense of belonging to it. Most respondents (61%) identify NATO as "they", seeing it as a "foreign" organization, showing little attachment to or identity with it. Only 29% refer to NATO as "we". The remaining 10% had trouble answering the question and replied "both", even though the response was not listed among the options.

The division of Czech citizens into two groups (along the lines of those who answered "we" or "they") has an important differentiating effect on their other attitudes and evaluations. Those who perceive NATO as "our" organization are more positive in their evaluations of NATO's contributions to the Czech Republic. They tend to be men, people with higher education, from larger cities, and people who expect that their financial situation will improve in the future. They agree with the idea of the Czech Republic assisting other NATO members. They also value Western countries (not Czech institutions and citizens) for their efforts and interest in

helping the Czech Republic accede to NATO. They trust political institutions responsible for the defence of the Czech Republic and the leadership of the Czech armed forces. They see the United States as a real partner in NATO.

As we discuss later, the reasons for the low level of identification among the other group (those who answered “they”) are not related to Article 5 of the Washington Treaty. The problem is their lack of identification with non-Article 5 operations.

There is an anomaly in that the percentage of those who currently support Czech membership in NATO (70%) is far greater than the percentage of those who identify with NATO (29%). The most likely reason for this is their lack of participation in the process of decision-making in 1997-99 about joining the organization. An overwhelming majority of respondents (71%) feel that there should have been a referendum (40% definitely agree, 31% somewhat agree). Also significant is the fact that many of these people are strong supporters of Czech membership in NATO.

The way the process was conducted has led to many Czechs having a lack of identification with NATO. Their attitude to the organization is distanced and non-committal. The extent of low knowledge about NATO in the Czech Republic is illustrated by the fact that the percentage of respondents who knew the name of the current Secretary General of NATO (Lord Robertson, 1%) was lower than the margin of error (though 17% also gave the name of Javier Solana, signifying some recent interest). Overcoming this information deficit will take a long time and a good deal of effort because, as the results of our research indicate, those citizens who are not able to identify with NATO are no longer interested in receiving information about it. NATO has a role to play in reducing this information deficit.

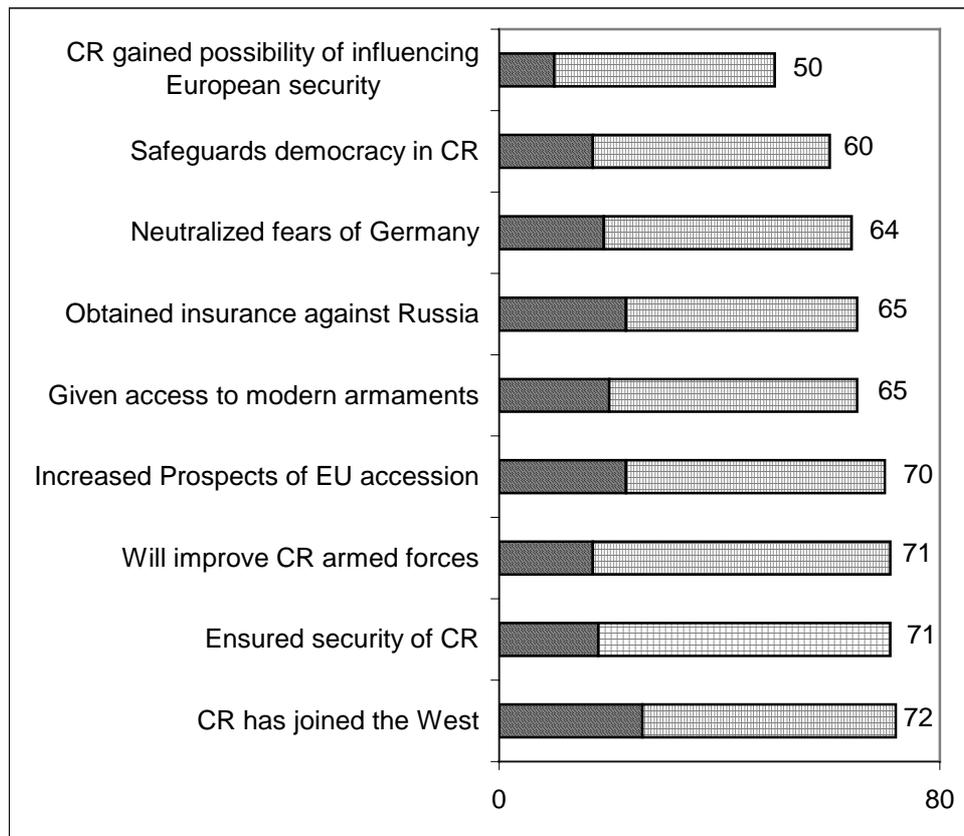
The low degree of identification with NATO had an important role in determining Czech behaviour during NATO’s Operation Allied Force in 1999. The majority of Czech citizens did not support the operation and refused to assume responsibility for it. Many leading Czech politicians took a similar position, even though they had been active in the process of the Czech Republic joining the Alliance.

Perceptions of Positive & Negative Aspects of NATO Membership

Recognition of the positive consequences of Czech membership in NATO includes two principal areas. The first involves the improvement of the overall international situation and geopolitical position of the country. The second area concerns the positive effect of membership on the country's internal situation. It is important to note that the public is increasingly aware that the enlargement of the EU and NATO are complementary issues rather than a substitute for each other. This indicates the recognition that security is a key condition for far-reaching reforms and modernization of institutions and the economy.

The positive evaluations of Czech membership in NATO have three features worth stressing. One, Czechs consider NATO membership a suitable way to increase the performance level of the Czech military, not to eliminate it. Two, Czechs perceive accession to NATO primarily as a move toward the West rather than a move against Russia; viewing Russia from inside NATO’s protective shield has contributed to seeing Russia from a perspective not characterized by fear and animosity. Three, NATO has neutralized the historical Czech traumas felt toward Germany.

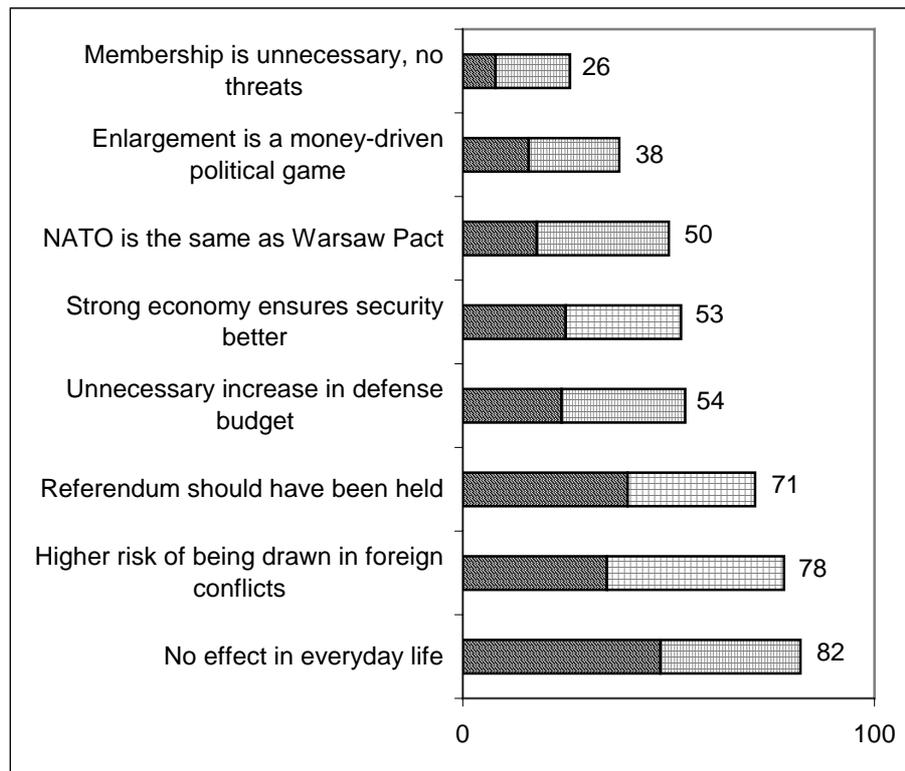
The Impact of NATO Membership in the Czech Republic

Figure 7: Positive aspects of NATO membership (definitely agree, somewhat agree, %)

Supporters and opponents of Czech membership in NATO agree on the problematic aspects of membership. Even though the majority of people began to have a “full feeling of security” only after the country joined NATO, this has already become an integral part of life, “invisible” amongst the daily concerns. Nevertheless, Czechs are also concerned that their membership increases the risks of becoming drawn into foreign conflicts and increases defence spending unnecessarily. In this respect, the lack of transparency of NATO actions in potential conflicts is most significant. An additional important element here is the low participation and the lack of trust in Czech political decision-making in the area of defence and security.

Notably, half of the respondents (50%, of which 18% “definitely agree” and 32% “somewhat agree”) justified their low support for NATO membership with the argument that NATO is analogous to the Warsaw Pact. The idea has complicated roots, with the most significant being the rejection of “out-of- area” operations because they can be perceived as aggression against non-member countries. Czech society has a conservative attitude to interventions by military alliances, especially led by a superpower, in the internal affairs of other countries. In general, Czechs evaluate peace operations positively. However, they see Operation Allied Force as having crossed the limits of “peace operations”. In comparing NATO to the Warsaw Pact, the Czechs are also expressing their aversion to military alliances, seeing them as a necessary evil.

Figure 8: Problematic aspects of Czech membership in NATO (definitely agree, somewhat agree, %)



Perceptions of How the Czech Republic Should Act in NATO

To a certain extent, Czech society is still searching for its relationship to NATO. The view oscillates between an active and responsible position with natural allies and a more controversial and passive position as a manipulated party in a military alliance which nevertheless provides for Czech security. The range of opinions regarding the content and quality of the Czech membership in NATO comes across in the area of involvement and participation of the Czech Republic in NATO. The basic question relates to the citizens' opinion on the desired level of activity that the Czech Republic should aim for in NATO.

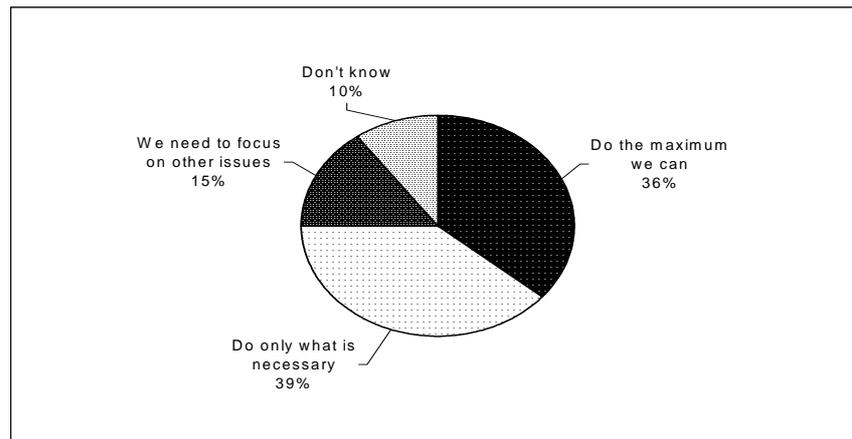
The main distinction between those who think that the Czech Republic should do the maximum and those who think that the country should do only what is necessary lies in their willingness to support out-of-area operations. The former view NATO's out-of-area operations as part of the Czech responsibility for European security, whereas the latter view such operations as aggression and a continuation of Cold War patterns of behaviour.

When asked about the specific actions that the Czech Republic should take as part of NATO, respondents most frequently mentioned the wish to modernize the armed forces and equipment up to NATO standards. The respondents were less favourably disposed toward NATO locating a regional headquarters in the Czech Republic or the potential for Czech participation in NATO's peace operations. The public remains sensitive to the presence of foreign troops on Czech territory. But the question of participating fully in NATO's out-of-area operations remains among the most controversial items. A majority of respondents (51%, of which 23% "definitely

The Impact of NATO Membership in the Czech Republic

yes” and 28% “somewhat yes”) supported the statement that the Czech Republic should focus primarily on its own defence needs. The caveat here is that a Czech battalion has taken part in NATO’s operation in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The unit has received a great deal of attention by the Czech media and the Czech public has greeted the unit’s participation positively. Thus, when confronted with practical obligations, Czech society reacts more positively than the figures suggest. The scepticism that the survey indicates may thus be high at a theoretical level, but actual support for a specific operation may diverge greatly from that level, depending on the case and circumstances surrounding it.

Figure 9: How active should the Czechs be in NATO? (%)



Cautious attitudes also come out in the replies to the question of specific Czech contributions to NATO’s peace operations. The majority of respondents were willing to provide combat support units (76%, of which 28% “definitely yes” and 48% “somewhat yes”), allow the use of Czech air bases (66%, of which 28% “definitely yes” and 38% “somewhat yes”), and allow the use of Czech surface transport infrastructure (63%, of which 26% “definitely yes” and 37% “somewhat yes”). But a majority was opposed to more active forms of participation, such as sending Czech combat units into action.

Czech Behaviour During Operation Allied Force

Operation Allied Force, launched in response to the conflict in Kosovo, came largely as a surprise to Czech society and caught it unprepared. Retrospectively, three equally represented groups of people with different opinions can be distinguished. A third of respondents did not expect anything like Operation Allied Force when they thought of the responsibilities that came with NATO membership. Another 30% were aware that Czech membership would involve certain responsibilities but did not expect that the Czech Republic would need to fulfil them so soon and facing such an intensive operation. Only 27% expected involvement in such an operation. There were many respondents with a critical attitude toward NATO within the last group. These “bad prophets” felt justified in their predictions that Czech membership in NATO would involve many risks and entail negative consequences. Nor are they enthusiastic about Czech membership in NATO. They accept, even if grudgingly, the responsibilities of NATO membership after the accession of the

Czech Republic to the alliance but they remain critical of NATO's peace operations.

The disenchantment of the Czech public during the operation was tied closely to the lack of clarity about the meaning of Czech membership in NATO. Discussions in the Republic prior to accession focused on security guarantees and costs rather than on responsibilities ensuing from membership. The content of membership was presented to the Czech public in an incomplete, shallow, and overly optimistic form.

A plurality of the respondents (31%) felt that the Czech Republic passed satisfactorily the test in Kosovo as a new member of NATO. These respondents are the same people who fully identify with Czech membership in NATO and who support NATO's active engagement in out-of-area peace operations. Another 16% thought that the Czechs fulfilled their basic commitments but could have done more. Many respondents (22%) thought that the Czech Republic met its responsibilities but did so with substantial difficulties. Only 4% agreed with the statement that the Czech Republic was primarily a burden to the alliance during the operation. Many of the respondents (14%) remained completely opposed to the operation, saying that the Czech Republic should have stopped the bombing campaign.

The picture that emerges is that most respondents came out satisfied with Czech performance during Operation Allied Force. This view is at odds with the general assessment of Czech performance within NATO. If almost one third of the citizens believe that the Czech Republic performed well and fulfilled all of its responsibilities, despite the problematic diplomatic steps that the Czechs took (most of all, the Czech-Greek Peace Initiative, put together on the Czech side by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Jan Kavan), then we can infer that the media and the political elite have created an incomplete and distorted portrayal of the situation. At the official level political, diplomatic and military representatives from NATO and individual allied countries repeatedly assured the Czech public that the country fulfilled its new role very well. Such comments may have been meant to downplay the dissatisfaction at NATO with the Czech Republic and to portray an image of unity within the organization but they do not represent the real assessment of Czech performance. The official reassurances carry much weight in the Czech context and, because they were not accompanied by any critical analysis of Czech behaviour by the Czech media, they may have strengthened the mistaken sense of self-satisfaction with Czech performance. The lack of accurate assessment also makes it harder for Czech society to evaluate NATO itself as an organization.

Czech Views of NATO's Adaptation & Contemporary Role in International Security

A large majority of the respondents (72%) feel that NATO either has adapted fully (33%) or partially (39%) to the new security situation in Europe. Only 13% felt that NATO has not changed much since the end of the Cold War. Attitudes toward this topic are connected strongly with attitudes toward potential NATO operations. Those who view NATO exclusively as a territorial defence organization of the Western countries do not accept the alliance's out-of-area operations. They consider these actions a relapse to Cold War patterns of behaviour. On the other hand, a significant majority of Czechs (80%, of which 47% "definitely yes" and 33% "somewhat yes") want NATO to be a guarantor of international security. However, the manner in which NATO should fulfil this role is still a contested issue among the Czech public. Those who agree that NATO should play the role of an institution

The Impact of NATO Membership in the Czech Republic

guaranteeing international security also support NATO's out-of-area operations and agree with further enlargement of NATO. They believe that the United States is carrying out successfully its role, assumed after the Cold War, as the only superpower and the primary linchpin of international security.

The majority of Czechs think that NATO should focus on European security, including areas outside NATO member states (53%, of which 18% "definitely yes" and 35% "somewhat yes"). But an even larger majority think that NATO should focus primarily on defence of member countries (62%, of which 28% "definitely yes" and 34% "somewhat yes"). The results show that the Czech public is aware of NATO's assumption of greater responsibility for European security and also of the Czech share in this responsibility. But when it comes to the responsibilities and tasks that the Czechs may need to undertake, Czechs do not understand NATO well. They interpret NATO's transformation from the reference point of Cold War politics and the military aggression they experienced under the guise of "fraternal assistance" by the Warsaw Pact.

A large portion of the Czech public does not understand the meaning of involvement in operations outside NATO member states or involvement "only" on the territory of NATO member-states. In this way, a portion of the public shows its lack of understanding of the contemporary international security situation. The reaction of the Czech public to Operation Allied Force was a consequence of such a lack of understanding. Thinking of the consequences of NATO's potential action or inaction is not a strong feature of the Czechs. A possible explanation is that the Czech Republic had been cut off for years from the possibility of actively participating in international security and a segment of the population feels lost in the current situation. Czech politicians share some responsibility for this lack of understanding, but it is probably also the case that many Czech politicians suffer from the same lack of understanding of NATO's new missions.

Are the Czechs "Free Riders" in NATO?

The basic question that needs to be addressed is: did the Czech Republic join NATO to gain security by becoming a part of a strong alliance with a well developed defence system, or to join a strong alliance of states with a sense of shared responsibility for the security of the Euro-Atlantic space and willing to take action to uphold this security? A portion of the Czech public sees the former choice as a more accurate description of the Czech motivation for joining NATO. Consequently, the Czechs have been described as "free riders" (contribute nothing) or at least "easy riders" (contribute little) in the alliance. Is that an accurate description?

A primary issue here is the question of trust pertaining to Article 5 of the Washington Treaty. Ultimately, assistance from allies in case of aggression against a member-state is based on mutual trust that all member-states will meet their commitments. The Czech public has a strong overall level of trust toward the NATO allies, even though the extent of trust toward individual members varies. 83% of respondents (34% "definitely yes" and 49% "somewhat yes") believe that NATO allies would assist the Czech Republic if the country faced a military aggression.

Historical experience plays an important role here, since it is perceived as a lesson learned rather than a discouragement for the future. The respondents who trust in NATO allies' assistance tend to stress the need to remember the past experience with occupation. Yet they do not distrust those allies with whom the Czechs have

had a bad historical experience, such as the Germans. Those who trust the NATO allies also trust the Czech defence and security institutions. The synergy of defence and security capacity from Czech sources and from the NATO allies amounts to an important element of the public's trust in the validity of Article 5.

Notably, the percentage of those who trust in allied assistance is higher by 13% than that of those who support Czech membership in NATO. Even those who do not support Czech membership in NATO still trust the NATO allies to some extent. However, the percentage of those who state willingness to help another NATO member in case of an aggression against it is lower than the percentage of those who trust that the NATO allies would come to the assistance of the Czech Republic. A majority (60%, of which 18% "definitely yes" and 42% "somewhat yes") of the respondents were willing to support the participation of Czech units in defence of another NATO ally (with "Hungary or Greece" identified in the question as the countries needing assistance). The difference of 23% in replies to the two questions is potentially troubling.

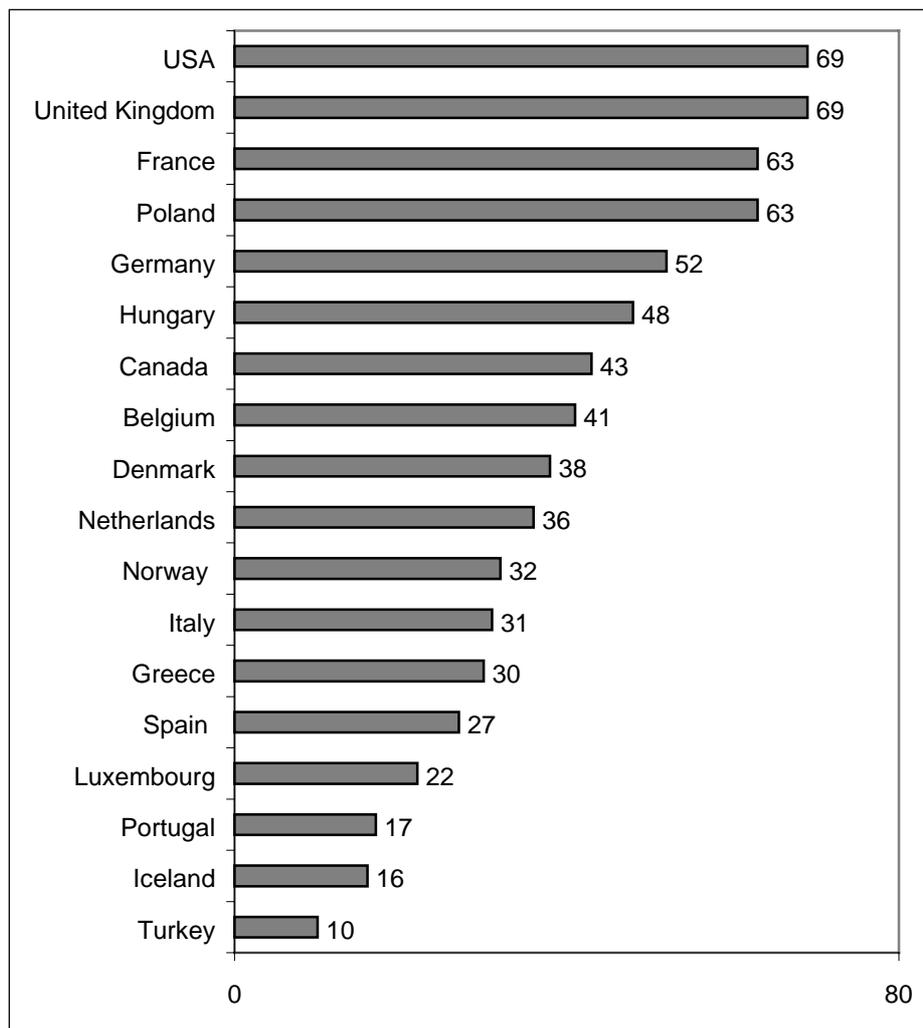
Juxtaposing the replies to questions of trust in the allies and willingness to assist the allies shows that the majority of Czechs perceive Czech membership as a clear guarantee of security and as a two-way street. Almost two-thirds (64%) of the respondents expect allies to assist and would assist the allies. One-tenth of the respondents (10%) have a strongly pessimistic and negative attitude toward the alliance; they would neither assist the allies nor do they expect assistance from them. A few of the respondents (2%) have an altruistic attitude, in that they do not expect the allies to assist the Czechs but still would assist the allies in case of need. While one quarter (24%) of the respondents expressed a "free rider" attitude, expecting assistance from the allies but not wishing to assist them, overall, the results do not support the assertion that the Czechs are "free riders". Fully two-thirds of the respondents would assist allies in case of need, and almost all of them see Czech membership in NATO as a symmetrical relationship.

Which Countries do the Czechs Trust the Most?

In case of aggression against the Czech Republic, the Czechs show the greatest level of trust in the main NATO countries (United States, United Kingdom, France, Germany) and Poland. The Poles have a high recognition among the Czechs for their traditionally positive attitude toward the military and defense issues and the fact that they resisted aggression during the 20th century even in seemingly hopeless situations. Their views toward Poland do not seem significantly influenced by the historical memory of Czech-Polish tensions (1920, 1939) or Poland's participation in the events of 1968. For the first time in recent history, the majority of Czechs perceive Germany as an ally. This is an enormous change.

The Czechs perceive NATO as a unified organization and they do not show great awareness of the internal divisions within NATO between the North American and European members, nor do they seem deeply aware of - or able to assume a clear position on - the issue of an EU defence identity divergent from that of NATO. Though a majority of Czechs believe that the European countries are capable of using their military power jointly and independently of the USA (56%, of which 17% "definitely agree" and 39% "somewhat agree"), they also do not believe that the Europeans are able yet to face major security pressures (including those from Russia) without relying on the USA (38% yes, 49% no).

The Impact of NATO Membership in the Czech Republic

Figure 10: Czech reliance on assistance from specific allies in case of crisis (%)

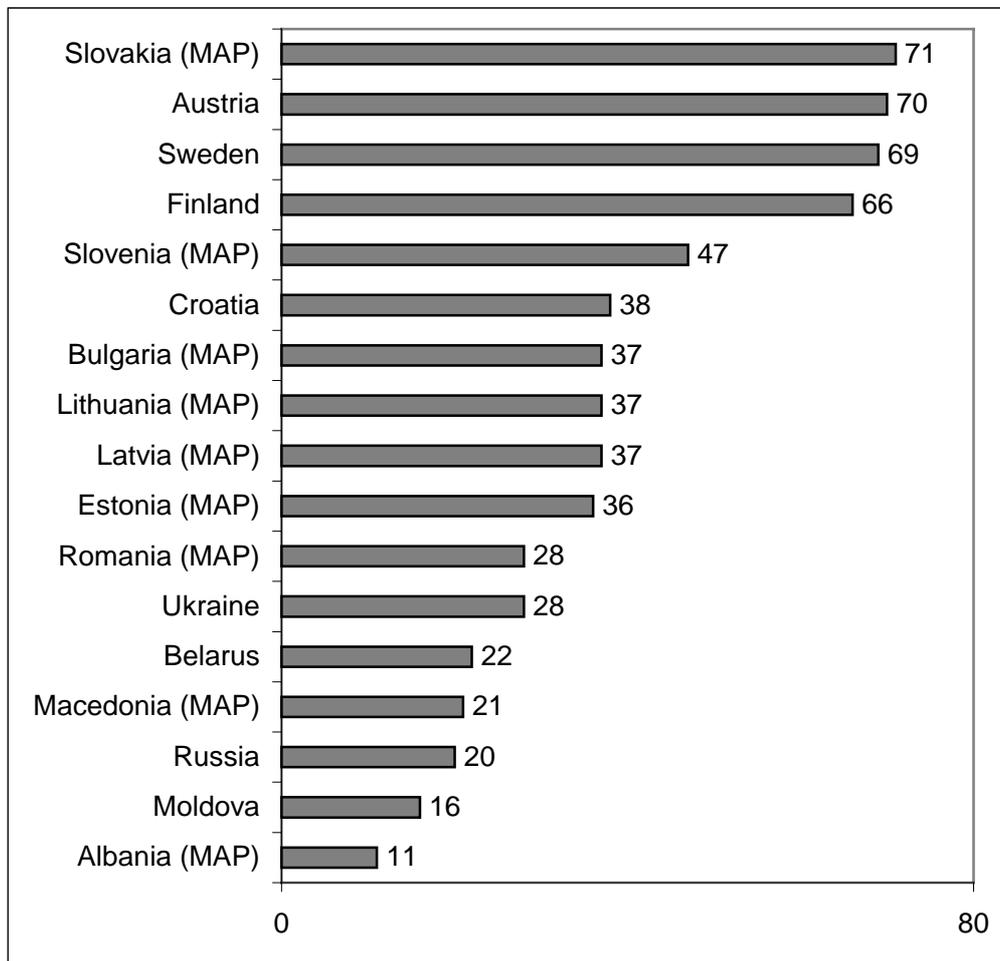
Czech Attitudes Toward the Further Enlargement of NATO

Is it true that, in the context of the national rivalries common in central Europe, once a country joins NATO its willingness to proceed with further enlargement decreases, because it is struggling with meeting the requirements and responsibilities of membership? The question is not theoretical. NATO's concern about this possibility led to the insertion of a specific requirement into NATO's Study on Enlargement that new members would keep the door open to further enlargement.⁷ Survey results show that Czechs overwhelmingly support further enlargement, with 64% of the respondents in favour of new members joining in the "next 2 to 5 years". Only one fifth opposed further enlargement. In general, the Czechs show a good deal of understanding for the security concerns of the countries either aspiring or in a position to join NATO, although the support varies greatly depending on the specific candidate country.

The Czechs give the highest degree of support and approval to Slovakia (72%). The figure is far greater than any other Membership Action Plan (MAP) country (the long list of post-communist aspirants to NATO). The next highest MAP country, Slovenia, has the approval of 47% of the respondents, a huge difference between the two states. The results indicate that the majority of Czechs still see Slovakia as a

country close to the Czech Republic, whose stability and security are matters of deep Czech national interest.

Figure 11: Which countries do you consider as eligible candidates for possible NATO membership in the next decade? (%)



Czech support for the accession of the Baltic States is much lower. Lower familiarity with these countries is one probable factor. Another factor is Russian opposition, which the Czechs take seriously. The Czechs exhibit similarly sceptical views toward the accession of the Balkan aspirants to NATO. Support for Croatia is notable, in that the country is not even in the Membership Action Plan. Czechs tend to perceive the political and economic situation in Romania, Macedonia and Albania as unstable, making these countries appear risky as NATO members.

Although they are not official candidates, the countries that are members of the EU but not NATO (Austria, Sweden and Finland) received some of the highest support from the respondents. This stems from the Czechs' view of NATO as an integrated system of European security. They see EU states as part of this system, even those that, from a Czech perspective, may be problematic and sometimes outside the norms of contemporary European politics.

The respondents also had a low level of support for Russian membership, though there are many countries that the Czechs evaluated more negatively. Indeed, the fact that one-fifth of respondents support Russian membership in NATO is

The Impact of NATO Membership in the Czech Republic

remarkable and indicates that many Czechs are already able to view Russia with a certain degree of detachment from their historical experiences. This may stem from the security offered by Czech membership in NATO.

Conclusions

Our research indicates the central role that NATO plays in determining the attitudes of the Czechs toward security, defence and the military. On the other hand, we cannot overlook the fact that attitudes toward NATO are derived from a much more complex system of historical and international connections.

Czech society has not remained outside of NATO. Czechs value and support the security that NATO membership offers. A major portion of the Czech public gained a feeling of full security with the country's accession. The feeling of full security forms the basis for overcoming the Czech historical traumas related to the major international actors that had exerted control over central Europe during the past two centuries (Germany and Russia), for the creation of national capabilities that contribute to the provision (rather than just consumption) of security, and for improving the country's prospects for successful integration into the EU. On the last point, Czech membership in NATO improves its position during the accession negotiations with the EU.

Not surprisingly, a sceptical and untrusting attitude is held by the less educated members of the population, those having a lower professional standing and less ability to identify the geopolitical implications of the country's security. This attitude is also strongly supported by a communist political orientation, which is the strongest source of reservations toward otherwise widely accepted geopolitical and security contributions of Czech accession to NATO. It is important here to stress the importance of higher education and professional standing for the ability to identify the positive consequences of NATO membership. These factors also have the effect of resisting a more cynical approach toward security as something founded on economic strength and financial power. A potential lesson for other new member and aspirant countries is that support for NATO membership and the fulfilment of national responsibilities in NATO rely on the educational capital of the higher socio-professional elite.

Taking at face value NATO's justification of enlargement as a move towards a feeling of full security in the post-communist countries of central Europe, we can say that survey research shows that enlargement has been a success in the Czech Republic. As far as we know, this is the first comprehensive effort that has aimed to address this question. Similar efforts are in order in Poland and Hungary, though we suspect that such efforts will show similar results. In fact, the Czech Republic is the "difficult case" of the three new members because security concerns were lower in the Czech Republic than in Poland and Hungary prior to accession to NATO.

Interestingly enough, some of the fears expressed in NATO prior to the 1997-99 round of enlargement have not come true. For example, the Czech perception of Russia has moved from one of a predatory adversary to one of potential partner. Similarly, Czechs support further enlargement. Their views of the readiness of specific countries do not diverge greatly from mainstream opinions in NATO.

The perception of full security and support for NATO membership has not weakened the willingness of the Czechs to invest in national defence and to modernize their

military or their willingness to participate personally in the country's defence. In fact, the results are just the opposite. With the country's membership in NATO, Czech society gained incentives for improving its own defence capabilities. Two thirds of the people recognize that effective membership entails a well-performing Czech military that is integrated fully in NATO's system of collective defence. The public has a good understanding of the military's limitations and is ready to support fundamental reform, including increases in the defence budget. Czech taxpayers may even give their military carte blanche to pursue comprehensive reform in order to achieve the standards of other members. The only concern they have is that the money be spent wisely.

Even though the Czechs are highly critical of the current state of their military, they retain a high level of trust in the specific military institutions in charge of defence (General Staff, Ministry of Defence, the officer corps) in an emergency or a crisis. Instead, most Czechs see the main source of problems in the national security apparatus in the unsatisfactory abilities and performance of political and constitutional bodies. This is a problem because trust toward these institutions is an important condition for citizens' willingness to participate personally in defence.

Strong support for NATO is linked to the awareness of a shared responsibility under the Washington Treaty concerning the promise to assist allies in case of need. However, the full meaning of alliance operations has not been internalized, especially when it comes to non-Article 5 military operations. Without a clear knowledge of the connection between NATO's peace operations and European security and lacking a public debate on such issues, most Czechs perceive operations such as Allied Force as a relapse into Cold War-era patterns of behaviour and an aggression of a military alliance against a sovereign country. Such perceptions stem from the passivity of Czech politicians and, to some extent, from the manner in which NATO's leadership has treated the new member countries.

The main source of hesitations toward NATO, shared by an overwhelming majority of the Czechs (80%) and even by those who fully support Czech membership, is a perception of a low level of influence that the public has on decision-making about security issues. Examples include the perception of a lack of transparency and of low democratic standards of behaviour in the process of reaching the decision about the Czech Republic's accession (most people would have preferred a referendum), as well as concerns that Czech membership in NATO can draw the country into military conflicts without a possibility to influence the decision-making process.

The Czech experience shows that accession to NATO is a strong test of maturity not only for politicians and soldiers, but also, and perhaps primarily, for society and citizens. During the 1997-99 round of enlargement, the stress in the public domain was that the possibility of joining NATO was a unique opportunity that the Czechs could not afford to miss. Consequently, the Czech citizen was left in a passive situation. A better approach is to see the entire accession process as a gradual process of democratic maturity in the country, rather than a momentary event.

Lessons from the Czech accession to NATO have relevance for the next round of enlargement, both for potential members and for NATO. The alliance is taking on as members countries that have historical experiences different from those of long-standing NATO members. Governments and politicians of the candidate countries are not necessarily a reliable source of information, since they have incentives to portray the situation in as good a light as possible in order to advance their goal of accession. But ultimately, the taxpayers in the candidate countries need to make

The Impact of NATO Membership in the Czech Republic

good on the commitments. When these taxpayers are neither consulted about their views on accession nor informed properly about the costs, as happened in the Czech Republic, both the quality of the membership is damaged and NATO has to deal with embarrassments that are potentially damaging to its operations. This is a lesson learned from the manner of Czech accession to NATO and one that should not need to be relearned elsewhere.

ENDNOTES

¹ Tatiana Kostandinova, "East European Public Support for NATO Membership: Fears and Aspirations", *Journal of Peace Research*, 37:2 (2000), pp235-249.

² This is also the view generally shared by analysts of the Czech political scene, see Matthew Rhodes, "Czech Malaise and Europe", *Problems of Post-Communism*, 47:2 (March/April 2000), pp57-66. In itself, this touches on an even deeper issue of the quality of the Czech democracy; see Magdalena Hadjiisky, "The Failure of the Participatory Democracy in the Czech Republic", *West European Politics*, 24:3 (July 2001), pp43-64.

³ Public opinion surveys conducted by various polling agencies show a gradual decrease in the number of those who supported the NATO air campaign to 31%, with 62% against it. IVVM, 1999.

⁴ According to the Centre for Empirical Research (STEM), opinion that Russia is the biggest threat to the Czech Republic decreased between 1994-1997 from 57% to 49%. The number is high because of the formulation of the question, whereby the respondent is asked: "Which country represents the biggest military threat to our republic?" and he/she has to choose from the following responses: Russia, Germany, the Balkans, or other country.

⁵ The surveys were conducted by STEM, a public opinion research organization.

⁶ This was a multiple-choice question, asking the respondents to choose only one option.

⁷ Study on NATO Enlargement, September 1995, paragraph 30, <http://www.nato.int/docu/basicxt/enl-9501.htm>.

Ivan Gabal is the President of an analytical firm, Gabal Analysis & Consulting (Gabal A&C), headquartered in Prague, Czech Republic. Lenka Helsingova is a staff member at Gabal A&C. Thomas S Szayna is a political scientist at RAND, a U.S. research and analysis institution, headquartered in Santa Monica, California.

A fuller version of this paper is published as G107, ISBN 1-903584-71-X, and is available from CSRC on request.

Disclaimer

The views expressed are those of the
Authors and not necessarily those of the
UK Ministry of Defence or the US Department of Defense

ISBN 1-903584-71-X

Published By:

**The Conflict Studies Research
Centre**

Directorate General Development and Doctrine
Royal Military Academy Sandhurst
Camberley
Surrey
GU15 4PQ
England

Telephone : (44) 1276 412346
Or 412375
Fax : (44) 1276 686880
E-mail: csrc@gtnet.gov.uk
<http://www.csrc.ac.uk>

ISBN 1-903584-71-X