

 Policy Paper



# CZECHIA IN NATO AT 25

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## Executive Summary

1. Czechia acceded to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) on March 12, 1999. A quarter of a century on, the Central European nation stands as a strong actor in the international system rooted in democratic values.
2. As an active member of the Alliance, Czechia has cemented its status as a free and independent country that is capable of standing up for democracy and the rule of law in the world.
3. Since Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, Czechia has led NATO's adaptation to enhance its defence and deterrence capabilities. The country has been at the forefront of NATO's strategic response to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022.
4. With NATO membership, Czechia has achieved an unprecedented level of national security. In NATO, the Czech Republic has made an active contribution to the security of the Euro-Atlantic area - both in foreign missions and in response to the resurgence of Russia.

## Introduction

March 12, 2024 marked twenty-five years since<sup>1</sup> Czechia became a member of NATO alongside its neighbours, Poland and Hungary. The accession of the Central European country to the US-led military alliance has added strategic depth to the Euro-Atlantic space. As part of the collective security system of NATO, Czechia has also been able to consolidate its post-communist democratic transition free from external aggression.

For much of its history, Czechia has confronted external threats to its national sovereignty as the dominant powers of Western and Eastern Europe clashed over the continent's internal boundaries. In the twentieth century, the country suffered from invasion and occupation under both Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. Czechia's NATO accession in 1999 made a fundamental break from this traumatic past as it anchored the country's freedom and independence at the centre of Europe.

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<sup>1</sup> Date of paper written: March 21, 2025.

This paper seeks to provide a brief analysis of Czechia in NATO twenty-five years on from its accession to the alliance – in terms of the country's politics and security. The first section will examine why NATO is important to Czechia and what Czech membership of NATO adds to the alliance. An exploration of how Czechia perceives NATO membership will then be made. The paper will finish with a look at the benefits of NATO membership for the Central European nation.

## The importance of NATO for Czechia

NATO membership has anchored Czechia as a free and independent country in the centre of Europe.

The collapse of the Austro-Hungarian empire at the end of the First World War initiated the Czech national revival movement that aspired to achieve emancipation from foreign control. But German and Russian expansionism between 1938 and 1968 brought a brutal end to the country's democratic prosperity of the interwar period.

In 1989, the Czech people once again took the streets to demand their country's right to self-determination as a free and independent nation in the Velvet Revolution. Under the leadership of Vaclav Havel (1993-2003), Czechia reasserted the system of parliamentary democracy that it established in 1919.

NATO membership was seen as a critical part of Czechia's return to Europe as a democracy from decades of foreign occupation. In 1999, Milos Zeman - the Czech prime minister that presided over the accession to NATO - stated that 'we have finally embarked on the path leading us to the Europe which is undivided and free.'<sup>2</sup>

Lord Ismay, the first secretary-general of NATO (1952-57), stated that 'the purpose of the NATO alliance is to keep the Russians out, the Americans in, and the Germans down'. This umbrella of collective security enshrined under Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty provided the Czech Republic for the first time in its history with a guarantee that it would be shielded from external military intervention.

NATO membership in 1999 helped Czechia to integrate with the West free from the threat of invasion by its larger neighbours, such as Germany and Russia. As Article 2 of the North Atlantic

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<sup>2</sup> "NATO - Declassified: Czechia and NATO - 1999", North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, accessed March 21, 2025, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/declassified\\_223150.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/declassified_223150.htm).

Treaty states, NATO allies are committed to 'strengthening their free institutions 'and thus contributing to 'the further development of peaceful and friendly relations.'<sup>3</sup>

While communist rule in Central and Eastern Europe was overthrown in 1989, the democratic future of Czechia remained uncertain. The Czech people faced the task of resurrecting their system of parliamentary democracy from the interwar period. But NATO, together with other international and regional actors, played a key role in anchoring the Czechia's democratic values. In 1995, Czechia secured approval from the United States to participate in NATO's Partnership for Peace programme (PfP) - a crucial step on the path towards full NATO membership.<sup>4</sup>

As a member of the PfP, Czechia cemented its status as a reliable and trusted member of the free nations. The Czech armed forces 'absorbed NATO procedures in defence planning and implementation of force build-up, tailored to Alliance standards and overall goals.'<sup>5</sup> Czechia's active engagement with NATO led the country to make a meaningful contribution to Euro-Atlantic security in the post-Cold War era.

The Czech armed forces played a crucial role in NATO's response to the Yugoslav wars of secession in the 1990s. Czech contingents and units were deployed to the NATO-led operations in Afghanistan (2001-2014) and Kosovo KFOR (1999-).<sup>6</sup> In the Middle East and North Africa, Czechia served in NATO's mission in Iraq and made a significant contribution to the construction of the Military Women's Training Centre in Jordan.<sup>7</sup>

The first-hand experience of Czechia with the uncertainty of the post-communist transition has made the country a strong advocate for NATO's open door policy.<sup>8</sup> Czechia actively supports the 'convergence 'of aspiring NATO member states - Bosnia-Herzegovina and Georgia - with the

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<sup>3</sup> "NATO - Official text: The North Atlantic Treaty, 04-Apr-1949", North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, accessed: March 21, 2025, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official\\_texts\\_17120.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_17120.htm).

<sup>4</sup> "NATO Review - Vaclav Havel: remembering the big little man", North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, accessed: March 21, 2025, <https://www.nato.int/docu/review/articles/2012/05/07/vaclav-havel-remembering-the-big-little-man/index.html>.

<sup>5</sup> "Professional Armed Forces | Ministry of Defence & Armed Forces of the Czech Republic", Ministry of Defence & Armed Forces of the Czech Republic, accessed: March 21, 2025, <https://mocr.mo.gov.cz/scripts/detail.php?id=5762#:~:text=In%2520its%2520effort%2520to%2520become,Alliance%2520standards%2520and%2520overall%2520goals>.

<sup>6</sup> "Foreign Operations | Ministry of Defence & Armed Forces of the Czech Republic", Ministry of Defence & Armed Forces of the Czech Republic, accessed: March 21, 2025, <https://www.mo.gov.cz/scripts/detail.php?id=5807>.

<sup>7</sup> "The Czech Republic handed over the new Military Women's Training Centre to Jordanian Armed Forces", Permanent Delegation of the Czech Republic to NATO in Brussels, accessed: March 21, 2025, [https://mzv.gov.cz/nato.brussels/en/news\\_events/the\\_czech\\_republic\\_as\\_one\\_of\\_main.html](https://mzv.gov.cz/nato.brussels/en/news_events/the_czech_republic_as_one_of_main.html).

<sup>8</sup> "25 years of Czechia in NATO | Embassy of the Czech Republic in Helsinki", Embassy of the Czech Republic in Helsinki, accessed: March 21, 2025, [https://mzv.gov.cz/helsinki/en/news/x25\\_years\\_of\\_czechia\\_in\\_nato.html](https://mzv.gov.cz/helsinki/en/news/x25_years_of_czechia_in_nato.html).

Alliance.<sup>9</sup> This reflects Czechia's perception that NATO enlargement plays a key role in combating Russia's interest to reassert a sphere of influence in Eastern Europe.

## How Czechia Perceives NATO

Czechia considers NATO to be a fundamental part of its security on a national and Euro-Atlantic level. The Czech defence minister, Jana Cernochova, stated in her country's defence strategy document released in 2023 that 'more than ever before, it is now clear how important the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and defence cooperation with our Allies are to us.'<sup>10</sup>

As a country with historical experience of Russian expansionism, Czechia has played a crucial role in enhancing NATO's deterrence capabilities since Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014.<sup>11</sup> The Central European nation actively implemented NATO assurance measures under the Readiness Action Plan that Allies agreed to establish at the Wales Summit in 2014. More broadly, the country supported NATO's policy shift from crisis management to 'defence and deterrence based on a balanced combination of nuclear and conventional capabilities to counter current and future threats.'<sup>12</sup>

Czechia has adopted a leading role in NATO's adaptation to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. In response to the issue of Ukrainian ammunition shortages, the Czech government announced an initiative designed to increase arms supplies to the frontline. By October 2024, Ukraine received more than one-third of the 500,000 rounds of ammunition expected to be delivered.<sup>13</sup> Cernochova announced that Czechia will expand the initiative in 2025 to include the purchasing of artillery ammunition.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> "Czechia and NATO | Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic", Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, accessed: March 21, 2025, [https://mzv.gov.cz/jnp/en/foreign\\_relations/security\\_policy/czechia\\_and\\_nato\\_1/index.html](https://mzv.gov.cz/jnp/en/foreign_relations/security_policy/czechia_and_nato_1/index.html).

<sup>10</sup> "Defence Strategy of the Czech Republic 2023", Ministry of Defence & Armed Forces of the Czech Republic, accessed: March 21, 2025, [https://www.mo.gov.cz/assets/en/ministry-of-defence/basic-documents/defence-strategy-of-the-czech-republic\\_2023\\_final.pdf](https://www.mo.gov.cz/assets/en/ministry-of-defence/basic-documents/defence-strategy-of-the-czech-republic_2023_final.pdf).

<sup>11</sup> "SHAPE | Readiness Action Plan", North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, accessed: March 21, 2025, <https://shape.nato.int/readiness-action-plan>.

<sup>12</sup> "Czechia and NATO", Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, accessed: March 21, 2025, [https://mzv.gov.cz/jnp/en/foreign\\_relations/security\\_policy/czechia\\_and\\_nato\\_1/index.html](https://mzv.gov.cz/jnp/en/foreign_relations/security_policy/czechia_and_nato_1/index.html).

<sup>13</sup> "Ukraine receives over one-third of pledged shells from Czech initiative, ambassador says", Kateryna Hodunova, accessed: March 21, 2025, <https://kyivindependent.com/ukraine-receives-over-one-third-of-shells-from-czechia/>.

<sup>14</sup> "Czechia preparing new shell initiative to supply Ukraine in 2025", Kateryna Denisova and The Kyiv Independent news desk, accessed: March 21, 2025, <https://kyivindependent.com/czechia-preparing-new-shell-initiative-to-support-ukraine-in-2025/>.

Czechia's ammunition initiative forms part of a wider emphasis that the country has placed on defence and deterrence under the umbrella of NATO. The Czech Armed Forces Development Concept 2035 made clear that NATO must prepare for 'a large-scale high-intensity war with a technologically advanced enemy who owns nuclear weapons. government Czech The <sup>15</sup> demonstrated its commitment to meet NATO's security challenges by hitting the 2% defence spending threshold at the start of 2025.<sup>16</sup>

The modernisation of Czechia's armed forces underlines its readiness to play a central part in bolstering NATO's collective defence. In 2024, the Czech government signed a memorandum of understanding with the US to procure 24 fifth-generation F-35 fighter jets - the most significant upgrade of Czech airpower.<sup>17</sup> This new capability will be key to the air defence of the Euro-Atlantic area should a wider war between Russia and NATO erupt.

In addition to the conventional security domain, Czechia believes that NATO has to improve its capability to counter hybrid threats. The country notes the importance of developing military, paramilitary, and civilian methods to combat new threats in the fields of energy, cyberspace, and terrorism.<sup>18</sup> Accordingly, the Czech government has been proactive in informing the debate in NATO on how it should respond to Russia's hybrid threat.<sup>19</sup>

## The benefits NATO membership has brought to Czechia

The benefits of NATO membership for Czechia are wide and far-reaching. As a member of the world's largest military alliance, Czechia has achieved a level of national security on a scale unprecedented in its history. But NATO membership has also brought Czechia an enhanced political role - both on a regional and international level.

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<sup>15</sup> "Czech Armed Forces Development Concept 2035", Ministry of Defence and Armed Forces of the Czech Republic, accessed: March 21, 2025, [https://www.mo.gov.cz/assets/en/ministry-of-defence/basic-documents/cafdc\\_2035.pdf](https://www.mo.gov.cz/assets/en/ministry-of-defence/basic-documents/cafdc_2035.pdf).

<sup>16</sup> "Czechia reaches 2% of GDP defence spending target for first time in 20 years - Euractiv", Aneta Zachova, accessed: March 21, 2025, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/czechia-reaches-2-gdp-defence-spending-target-for-first-time-in-20-years/>.

<sup>17</sup> "Minister Cernochova sealed the procurement of F-35 aircraft today | Ministry of Defence & Armed Forces of the Czech Republic", Ministry of Defence & Armed Forces of the Czech Republic, accessed: March 21, 2025, <https://www.mo.gov.cz/en/ministry-of-defence/newsroom/news/minister-cernochova-sealed-the-procurement-of-f-35-aircraft-today-249061/>.

<sup>18</sup> "Czechia and NATO | Ministry of the Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, accessed: March 21, 2025, [https://mzv.gov.cz/jnp/en/foreign\\_relations/security\\_policy/czechia\\_and\\_nato\\_1/index.html](https://mzv.gov.cz/jnp/en/foreign_relations/security_policy/czechia_and_nato_1/index.html).

<sup>19</sup> "Czech Minister Lipavsky highlights Russian hybrid threats at the GLOBSEC Conference", Beata Stur, accessed: March 21, 2025, <https://www.europeaninterest.eu/czech-minister-lipavsky-highlights-russian-hybrid-threats-at-the-globsec-conference/>.

The enlargement of NATO gave Czechia opportunities to collaborate and strengthen relations with its neighbours, Hungary and Poland militarily. In 1991, NATO established the North Atlantic Cooperation Council that welcomed 40 countries - including the former Warsaw Pact states - to meet and consult on common security issues.<sup>20</sup> Czech soldiers trained alongside their counterparts from NATO under Exercise Cooperative Bridge in 1994, which aimed to improve their 'interoperability and professionalism.'<sup>21</sup>

As a member of the Alliance, Czechia was able to adapt its armed forces to twenty-first century warfare. In 2004, Czech soldiers were sent to counter any remaining Taliban and Al-Qaeda terrorist forces on the Afghan-Pakistani border as part of the NATO-led mission in Afghanistan (2001-14). This marked the first time that Czechia deployed its troops in a combat zone since the Second World War.<sup>22</sup>

The modernisation of the Czech armed forces under the NATO umbrella has enabled the Central European state to play an active role in enhancing the security of the Euro-Atlantic space. As part of NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence (eFP), Czech military personnel have been deployed to Latvia and Lithuania - two frontline NATO states - and Czech pilots have taken part in air policing missions.<sup>23</sup><sup>24</sup> Czechia is also a key contributor to the Allied Command Transformation, which spearheads the development of NATO's military structures, forces, capabilities, and doctrines<sup>25</sup>.

Czechia's enhanced defence capabilities allowed the country to adopt a leading role in NATO's response to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. The country delivered tanks, combat and armoured vehicles and other heavy military systems to Ukraine worth a total of CZK 10 billion (€397 million) in the first year of the war alone.<sup>26</sup> Czechia has also been at the centre of NATO's policy implementation in response to Russia's war against Ukraine.

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<sup>20</sup> "NATO - Topic: North Atlantic Cooperation Council (1991-1997)", North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, accessed: March 21, 2025, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_69344.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_69344.htm)

<sup>21</sup> "Czechia and NATO", North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, accessed: March 21, 2025, <https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/223150.htm?selectedLocale=en>.

<sup>22</sup> "Czechs to serve in a military operation for the first time since WWII", Radio Prague International, accessed: March 21, 2025, <https://english.radio.cz/czechs-serve-a-military-operation-first-time-wwii-8083733>.

<sup>23</sup> "Enhanced Forward Presence - Lithuania, Latvia | Ministry of Defence & Armed Forces of the Czech Republic", Ministry of Defence & Armed Forces of the Czech Republic, accessed: March 21, 2025, <https://www.mo.gov.cz/en/foreign-operations/current/baltics/enhanced-forward-presence---latvia--lithuania-201314/>.

<sup>24</sup> "Baltic Air Policing | Ministry of Defence & Armed Forces of the Czech Republic", Ministry of Defence & Armed Forces of the Czech Republic, accessed: March 21, 2025, <https://www.mo.gov.cz/en/foreign-operations/current/baltic/baltic-air-policing-215776/>.

<sup>25</sup> "Czech Republic's General Hlavac Explores NATO Cooperation in US Visit - NATO's ACT", North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, accessed: March 21, 2025, <https://www.act.nato.int/article/gen-hlavac-visits-act/>.

<sup>26</sup> "Czechia sends hundreds of heavy military systems worth tens of billions to Ukraine during the first year of Russian invasion", Permanent Delegation of the Czech Republic to NATO in Brussels, accessed: March 21, 2025, [https://mzv.gov.cz/nato.brussels/en/news\\_events/czechia\\_sends\\_hundreds\\_of\\_heavy\\_military.html](https://mzv.gov.cz/nato.brussels/en/news_events/czechia_sends_hundreds_of_heavy_military.html).

At a summit of NATO defence chiefs held in Prague in September 2024, allied military leaders discussed the creation of the NATO Security Assistance and Training for Ukraine command. This body would allow NATO to oversee training of Ukrainian armed forces at training facilities in Allied countries, support Ukraine through the planning and coordination of donations; manage transfer and repair of equipment and provide support to the long-term development of Ukraine's armed forces.<sup>27</sup>

On a regional level, Czechia has built a strong relationship with Poland based on defence-military cooperation. Under the Canadian-led Enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) group in Latvia, Czech and Polish armed forces have conducted joint activities to reinforce the defence and deterrence posture of NATO's eastern flank.<sup>28</sup> Poland and Czechia have taken part in inter-governmental consultations that discuss the strengthening of the defence potential of NATO's eastern flank and countering hybrid and cyberspace threats.<sup>29</sup>

NATO membership has provided Czechia with a platform to deepen ties with the United States as well. In August 2023, the Czech government concluded a Defence Cooperation Agreement (DCA) with Washington, which enhances US-Czech military collaboration with a particular focus on NATO's eastern flank.<sup>30</sup>

## Conclusion

Over a quarter of a century has passed since Czechia acceded to NATO. Within that time, the country has transitioned from a period of foreign invasion and occupation into freedom and democracy. Czechia stands today as a strong and capable democratic actor in global affairs rooted in democratic values.

The Central European nation has emerged as a trusted and reliable ally of the Alliance. The Czech armed forces actively participated in NATO's foreign missions in the Balkans, Afghanistan, and the

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<sup>27</sup> "NATO - News: The NATO Chiefs of Defence met in Prague to implement Washington summit decisions, 13-Sep-2024", North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, accessed: March 21, 2025, [https://www.nato.int/cps/ge/natohq/news\\_228640.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/ge/natohq/news_228640.htm).

<sup>28</sup> "Poland and the Czech Republic together to strengthen security in the region - Ministry of National Defence - gov.pl website", Ministry of National Defence Republic of Poland, accessed: March 21, 2025, <https://www.gov.pl/web/national-defence/poland-and-the-czech-republic-together-to-strengthen-security-in-the-region>.

<sup>29</sup> "Strengthening defence cooperation and regional security were the topics of Polish - Czech consultations - Ministry of National Defence Republic of Poland gov.pl website", Ministry of National Defence Republic of Poland, accessed: March 21, 2025, <https://www.gov.pl/web/national-defence/strengthening-defence-cooperation-and-regional-security-were-the-topics-of-polish--czech-consultations>.

<sup>30</sup> "The Prime Minister signed the Czech-American Defense Agreement completing the ratification process | Government of the Czech Republic", Government of the Czech Republic, accessed: March 21, 2025, <https://vlada.gov.cz/en/media-centrum/aktualne/the-prime-minister-signed-the-czech-american-defense-agreement-completing-the-ratification-process-209311/>.



Middle East. The Czech Republic's first-hand experience of the challenges of democratic transition has made it a strong advocate for NATO's further enlargement in Central and Eastern Europe.

The Czech Republic perceives NATO to be the bedrock not only of its own security but the security of the entire Euro-Atlantic space. The country has taken a leading role in adapting NATO to the resurgent threat of Russia since the annexation of Crimea in 2014. Czechia has taken the initiative to inform the strategic response of NATO to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and strengthened cooperation with its NATO allies.

As an active member of NATO, Czechia maintains a high level of strategic importance. The country's strong contribution to the collective security of the Euro-Atlantic space will be vital as NATO adapts to a new era of great-power competition.

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