



Policy Paper



CZECHIA AND NATO: BUILDING A MORE CAPABLE, CONNECTED AND CREDIBLE EUROPEAN PILLAR

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About EUROPEUM

EUROPEUM Institute for European Policy is a non-profit, non-partisan, and independent think-tank focusing on European integration and cohesion. EUROPEUM contributes to democracy, security, stability, freedom, and solidarity across Europe as well as to active engagement of the Czech Republic in the European Union. EUROPEUM undertakes original research, organizes public events and educational activities, and formulates new ideas and recommendations to improve European and Czech policy making.

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About project

This project aims to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the Czech Republic's NATO accession, which occurred on March 12, 1999. Anchored in the historic context of NATO's formation on April 4, 1949, the primary goals of the campaign are to celebrate this significant milestone, effectively communicate the tangible benefits of Czech NATO membership to the public and cultivate a deeper understanding of NATO and U.S.'s pivotal role in safeguarding the nations and Central and Eastern European security. Additionally, the project's goal is to underscore the strength and benefits of the U.S.-Czech partnership.

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Executive Summary

Twenty-five years after NATO's first 'Eastern enlargement', the role of Central and Eastern European (CEE) allies has never been more important to European security. CEE allies will be key to building NATO's much discussed – and much needed – 'European Pillar'. This pillar will only work to keep the 'Americans in' and the 'Russians out' if it is inside NATO (rather than autonomous or in the EU) and is capabilities-based (rather than formal or institutional). CEE allies must now build on the strides they have made in the last two years, demanding recognition for the contributions they have and are making, to take the lead in building the European pillar – and being relied on to do so. Zooming in on Czechia, as a particular but also indicative case, this paper outlines how this CEE ally can continue to contribute to building the capabilities that Europe needs and how, by doing so with allies firmly in mind, it can become a strategic security provider and exercise greater influence.

In coordination with European and, especially, CEE allies, Czechia should further contribute by: building-out a more rounded national capability contribution including on logistics; seriously improving military mobility at home and with neighbours; and by investing in strategic enablers, air defence and strategic strike capability. This will require political courage and conviction, deft coordination between allies and additional financial commitment. Yet, if Czechia and other CEE allies deliver, NATO should not only reward but learn to rely on and actively support the leadership that is being shown, particularly by Czechia, Poland and the Baltic States. This would rebalance but also renew the alliance, making it more capable, connected and credible, which it needs to be in order to endure and keep Europe secure.

NATO's European Pillar Needs CEE Allies at its Heart – and Head

Celebrations for NATO's 75th birthday, making it definitively the most durable alliance in history,¹ have come at a time when the alliance faces considerable external and internal threats. The parallel festivities to mark the accession, 25 years ago, of the first CEE allies (Czechia, Hungary and Poland) and 20 years ago of the group that constitute many of today's frontline states (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia) provides a chance to reconsider the place and role of these countries, and the region, in the alliance. In light of their increasing contributions, the leadership that they have shown on Russia and Ukraine, as well as the centrality of the Eastern flank to NATO's future as well as its present, CEE states are key to building the alliance's much discussed² – and much needed - 'European pillar'.

Regardless of the outcome of the 2024 US Presidential election, NATO needs rebalancing. The focus of European fears has fallen on comments from (and supposed intentions of) former and possible future President Donald Trump, which cast doubt over his commitment to the alliance's centrepiece Article 5 mutual defence clause. It is too early to say what a Trump 2.0 Presidency would bring for NATO but, in any event – and also if Joe Biden wins a second term - the US will increasingly focus its military capabilities on the Indo-Pacific due to its growing competition with and the increasing threat from China. It is also true that both US defence spending (as a percentage of GDP) and troop numbers are at historic lows, especially when compared to the Cold War, meaning there is less to go around – particularly in terms of key enablers and strategic assets that are crucial for deterrence in Europe.³

¹ Apps, Peter. "Deterring Armageddon: A Biography of NATO." 2024.

² Bergmann, Max, Besch, Sophia, Droin, Mathieu, Monaghan, Sean. CSIS. "Strengthening NATO's European Pillar." 2024.

³ Michta, Andrew. DGAP. "The US Presidential Election 2024 – Two Outcomes, One Set of Challenges.", forthcoming in June 2024.

All this points to the clear need for “burden-shifting” rather than the mere burden-sharing that has been discussed in the past.⁴ Europeans need to take much greater responsibility for their own security than in the past – and the sooner the better.⁵ They must do so within NATO, rather than distracting and duplicative efforts to do so in the EU, less still indulging futile and divisive delusions of ‘strategic autonomy’ that only alienate Washington and split European allies (with CEE most strongly opposed to such approaches). Thankfully, one clarifying effect of Russia’s war in Ukraine and the Transatlantic response to it, has been to ensure that NATO is indeed the only game in town for deterrence and hard security, even if the EU will have an important role to play in bolstering Europe’s defence-industrial base and generating capabilities.⁶

Nonetheless, real burden-shifting means that a genuine European pillar of NATO must now be built. This process must draw on the positives that can be taken from the last two and a half years. NATO has a clearer sense of purpose now than at any time since the end of the Cold War. Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine has prompted a serious re-energization of the alliance and recognition by a broader spread of allies (and adversaries) of its true relevance and value. This has been accompanied by serious upgrading of NATO’s strategic concept at the 2022 Madrid summit and the adoption of a family of plans that give that concept substance at the Vilnius summit in 2023.⁷ This year’s Washington summit (09-11 July) focused on more comprehensively backing up those plans with capabilities.⁸

Despite this flurry of activity, the overall picture for the alliance is not a happy one. The emphasis on achieving unity at the summit is designed to paper-over the sizeable differences between allies on key issues including over Ukraine’s membership of the alliance and over whether and how Russia must be defeated, as well as (and in order to

⁴ Matle, Aylin. DGAP. “Burden Sharing Revisited” 2024.

⁵ McInnis, Katherine and Fata, Daniel. CSIS Brief. “From Burden Sharing to Responsibility Sharing” 2023.

⁶ Based on interviews and conversations with senior officials from multiple European allies March-June, 2024.

⁷ US Department of Defense. “SACEUR Provides Update on Deterrence, Defense of Euro-Atlantic Area”. 2024

⁸ NATO. NATO Washington Summit Declaration. 2024.

ensure it is) deterred. In both cases, CEE states have been in the vanguard of more assertive approaches. Poland, Czechia, and the Baltic States have been pushing for Russia to be decisively defeated and Ukraine swiftly included. They believe, rightly, that their views should be heeded, given that they were not only right about the Russian threat but also quick to act to support Ukraine in meaningful material terms. Moreover, the timescales for serious (re-)armament to be able to meet NATO's needs and face down the Russian threat from a position of strength are running faster in CEE allies than in Western European member states.

Despite recent disagreements in the alliance over policy on Ukraine and the choice of secretary general, CEE allies should continue with their clear, committed and positive approach. By doing so they can put themselves at the centre of building the 'European pillar' that is needed to rebalance and renew the alliance, regardless of the outcome of the US Presidential election in November.

To do its job, the European Pillar of NATO will need to be capabilities-based rather than formal – for example as a sub-division of NATO reporting to the North Atlantic Council - or institutionally autonomous – for example within the EU. To be meaningful, NATO's European Pillar will need to generate sufficient capability in at least six key aspects: core military assets, supplies, stocks and magazine; logistics; military mobility; strategic enablers; air defence; and (non-nuclear) strategic strike forces.

These six elements will make European NATO – and the alliance as a whole – more capable and will be an important step in becoming more credible. The process of developing the capabilities (many of which will not be able to be procured by individual member states) and enhancing military mobility will need European-NATO to become more connected. Done well and at pace, these twin processes – becoming more capable and more connected - will keep the alliance together: they will help 'keep the Americans in' and 'the Russians out', as two thirds of the alliance's original, unofficial mission statement had it. The last third, however should be rethought. Rather than 'keeping the Germans down' NATO should welcome and support CEE's rise, the momentum of which can drag the

European part of the alliance *up*. This embrace of CEE leadership is the other rebalancing NATO needs if it is to truly become more credible.⁹

To show how building NATO's European pillar can work in practice, with CEE at its heart, this analysis takes one ally from the region – Czechia – and works through these elements from the angles of capability and connectivity – goals which should be thought of as mutually reinforcing and interconnected. This analysis provides *indicative examples* of steps that other allies can also take to fulfil these goals and build the European Pillar – and indeed, they will need to work in concert through the European Union (EU) as well as NATO if they are to do so (especially on boosting defence industrial capacity, procurement and funding). The paper also provides *particular recommendations* for how Czechia can boost its own contribution to become a genuinely strategic player and continental security provider, in collaboration with other allies with and beyond CEE.

More Capable: From Boosting National Capacity to Enabling Continental Burden Shifting

Czechia's recent undertaking of the largest defence investment programme since the end of the Cold War mean that it is becoming a considerably more capable ally. The country's impressive, high-profile acquisitions now need to be backed-up by ensuring sufficient quantities of basic munitions, ensuring depth of magazine and sufficient supplies (and supply mechanisms), as well as enough well-trained active-duty troops and reserves.

Yet there is also considerable scope – and need - to think bigger, not only at home but for the alliance, to become a more strategic security provider, which would also allow Prague to exercise greater influence. Specifically, Czechia should explore ways to build European-NATO's capabilities in air defence, strategic enablers and non-nuclear strategic weapons

⁹ NATO exists to “keep the Russians out, the Americans in, and the Germans down.” A statement often attributed, perhaps apocryphally, to NATO's first Secretary General, Lord Hastings Ismay, which nonetheless has come to serve as a ready approximation of NATO's initial, and enduring Cold War mission – albeit with part about the Germans often misunderstood as it was really about ensuring Germany was also ‘in’ the alliance and, thus, did not rise to again become an unaligned revisionist and potentially nuclear power in the heart of Europe. See e.g. Sayle, Timothy Andrews. “Enduring Alliance: A History of NATO and the Postwar Global Order.” 2019. p. 6-7.

(massed, long-range precision strike) – and increase its own contribution and leadership role in doing so.

National Core Capability

In 2024, Czechia's defence spending will rise to 2.1% of GDP - above the NATO 2% target for the first time in thirty years and up from a paltry 0.9% in 2014 and 1.2% in 2019.¹⁰ According to government sources, the country would have already met the 2% target in 2023 had it not been for delays in finalising contracts.¹¹ The urgency created by Russia's full-scale war and the associated threat to NATO triggered an acceleration of planned increased spending as well as rethink of Czechia's defence and security positioning. The defence capability investment programme is underpinned by a new National Security Strategy (2023),¹² Defence Strategy (2023)¹³ and 'Concept of the Construction of the Czech Armed Forces for 2035' (CCCAF, 2024)¹⁴

The investment provides for capability expansion centred around several marquee acquisitions. Czechia has signed deals for equipment including (all examples taken from CCCAF, 2024 unless stated):

- 24 F-35 5th generation multirole stealth fighter aircraft (which will, from 2031, replace and exceed its 12 leased JAS-39 Gripen aircraft);
- 77 Leopard A2A8 which will provide the backbone of its Main Battle Tanks (MBT) force, complemented by the 45 Leopard 2A4s it is amassing;
- 246 CV-90 Infantry Fighting Vehicles while also upgrading its Pandur II wheeled APCs;
- 62 Caesar Self-Propelled Howitzers which will be added to its remaining 'Dana' artillery.

¹⁰ Ministry of Defence of the Czech Republic. "Defence Budget (1993-2021)." 2021.

¹¹ Conversations with Czech Government officials, March 2024, May 2024.

¹² Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic. "Security Strategy of the Czech Republic." 2023.

¹³ Ministry of Defence of the Czech Republic. "Defence Strategy of the Czech Republic." 2023.

¹⁴ Ministry of the Defence of the Czech Republic. "Concept of the Construction of the Czech Armed Forces for 2035."

Czechia is also growing its active service troops by more than five percent from currently around 28,000 to a planned 30,000. This is far down on the numbers it had when it joined NATO in 1999 (c.77,000) and after the 'Velvet Divorce' with Slovakia in 1993 (c.133,000), though there are currently no plans to reintroduce conscription (halted in 2004) in order to boost numbers further. There is, however, a stated intention to more than double the current active reserve from just over 4,000 to 10,000 troops.¹⁵

These strategies and concept clearly, backed up by the capability investment (including the highlights noted above), position Czechia to face up to the Russian threat, by contributing to the new NATO 'New Force Model' and 'Regional Plans'. The new acquisitions will not come in time to meet the previously set target of fielding a full, heavy mechanised brigade by 2026, but they will steadily and significantly increase Czechia's combat power over the next decade – and having the brigade ready by 2030 is a priority.

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NATO planners of course welcome the Czech procurement programme, and the strategic posture it reflects, which is in keeping with the awareness of the Russian threat and the recognised need to rise to it across the CEE region (with the notable exceptions of Hungary and Slovakia). However, as with other allied states that have increased defence spending, NATO planners also emphasise the need for Czechia to accompany high-profile acquisitions with large amounts of less attention-grabbing, but nonetheless essential munitions, supplies and logistics capacities – as well as sufficient numbers of trained personnel – are available to allow for prolonged, high-intensity war fighting. All of these aspects are covered in the CCCAF but must now be properly and fully implemented. As one senior NATO planner put it: "Allies need to do the boring stuff as well as the fancy stuff."¹⁷

The CCCAF sets a target of ensuring 30 days-worth of supplies and munitions at rates which they could be expected to be exhausted in high-intensity combat. This may not be

¹⁵ CTK Ceske Noviny. "Obrana od vstupu ČR do NATO výrazně zeštíhlila, dnes má 36.000 zaměstnanců." 2024.

¹⁶ CCCAF. 2024.p.25

¹⁷ Interview with senior NATO Planning Staff, March 2024.

enough and should be raised for certain key munitions categories. Czechia has also made logistical upgrades, introducing unified chassis platforms for ground-based logistics and procuring two Embraer C-390 transport aircraft to boost its strategic lift capability. The military's 14th Logistics Support Battalion will be raised into a regiment in order to help a wider process of capacity building in logistics services from battalion level to national level including supplying and sustaining troops and new equipment in field as well as the "repair and removal of equipment and materiel, and movement support."¹⁸

Logistic improvements also need to be integrated and considered in light of the need for enhanced military mobility, where there is a considerable role for other government ministries and agencies to do more, as noted in the 'More Connected' section of this report, which follows below.

Air Defence

The CCCAF also makes increased air defence a priority for deployment by 2030. This includes Air defence for troops in action,¹⁹ as well as for critical infrastructure and civilian/dual use potential targets on Czech territory, and to ensure Czechia's role as a key staging and transit country for allied forces (see section on Military Mobility below). Further investment in air defence is also warmly welcomed by NATO planners.²⁰ A start has been made with the acquisition of four SPYDER short range air defence missile batteries, and Derby (Python) missiles to equip them. However, this is only enough to (mathematically) cover around 16% of Czech territory and so would focus on protecting critical infrastructure and high-value military targets.²¹ Such capacity may have been sufficient for pre-2022 threat profiles, dealing mainly with non-state actors, but needs to be increased in light of the heightened Russian threat. Both present and foreseen systems would also struggle to deal with Ballistic missile threats.²²

¹⁸ CCCAF.2024. p.40.

¹⁹ Editorial. CZ Defence. "Effective air defence is a necessity for the Czech Army." 2024.

²⁰ Interview with senior NATO Planning Staff, March 2024.

²¹ Kolařík Tomáš. CZ Defence. „Ballistic missiles are a challenge for the future Czech air defence system.“ 2024.

²² Kolařík Tomáš. CZ Defence. „Ballistic missiles are a challenge for the future Czech air defence system.“ 2024.

Given the current and foreseen security environment, “significant strengthening” of ground-based air defence is rightly called for in the National Defence Strategy.²³ It will need to be harmonised with NATO’s Integrated Air and Missile Defence System²⁴ (including Ballistic Missile Defence) and, given Czechia’s participation in it, the German-launched European Sky Shield Initiative which is slated to use IRIS-T SLM, Patriot and Arrow 3 systems. Such a major, high-level capacity building programme should also, however, take account of French concerns over the strategic implications of boosting ballistic missile defence (potentially prompting Russian [p]reaction). With regard to Paris’ other concerns, capability upgrading should take precedence over buying European at every step.²⁵

Working toward a unified European solution would be optimal, but this should not be considered a prerequisite for moving forward in the short term, in which the perfect should not be allowed to become the enemy of the good. Longer-term considerations over the European defence industrial base, which will also play a role in building a credible European pillar of NATO, must however also be taken into account, though they need not predominate in every field. Where possible, Czechia should try to find similar deals as the one it secured for its joint procurement of Leopard 2A8 tanks, with a Czech production line and, thus, significant value sharing.²⁶ This will be helped if Czechia partners with other countries to do so. Moreover, Prague’s strategic imprint will grow if it is seen to have helped ‘more Europe’ in defence come to mean just that, rather than merely more France and more Germany.

Strategic Enablers

Common, integrated air defence is only one aspect of the capability set that European NATO needs to significantly bolster its ability to defend itself via high level, shared or shareable capabilities. In addition to air and missile defence and logistics, this challenge

²³ NATO. 2023. “NATO Integrated Air and Missile Defence.”, pp.17.

²⁴ NATO. 2023. “NATO Integrated Air and Missile Defence.”

²⁵ Osborne, Tony. Aviation Week Network. “French President Calls For European Anti-Missile Defense Initiative.” 2024.

²⁶ Tallis, Benjamin. Politico. “Germany learns to be a team player.” 2023.

will be particularly acute in terms of the strategic enablers that make NATO's doctrine possible, and which allow the alliance to fight with a technological edge.²⁷ These include: Intelligence and Reconnaissance; Air, Sea and Ground Surveillance; Airborne Warning and Control; Command, Control and Communications; Rapid, Networked Targeting; Electronic Warfare; Cyber Defence, and Mission-Networking.

European NATO states suffer from acute and significant deficiencies in many of these enablers, relying largely on the United States to provide them.²⁸ This creates a critical risk should US commitment to European defence wane or should a further, forced prioritisation of the Indo-Pacific theatre occur due to increased tensions with China, which would see these many of capabilities urgently required – and relocated - there. In either case, the lack of enablers would seriously blunt European NATO's combat power and, potentially, prevent it from fighting effectively at all, which would create a serious question over the credibility of alliance deterrence. Serious, common and coordinated investment in enablers is needed with an emphasis on Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance.

There is, thus, an opportunity for Czechia to build on the positive steps that it has taken in investing in defence and re-arming. To level-up its alliance contribution and exercise greater influence, Prague could (as called for in the National Defence Strategy – p16) join projects to acquire or build enablers – such as the NATO Support and Procurement Agency (NSPA) airborne early warning consortium.²⁹ Better still, Czechia should propose a comprehensive review of European enablers and identify costed, prioritised needs for investment and procurement. Prague should then seek opportunities to propose, coordinate or lead such investment and procurement projects (or aspects of them) to rapidly build up European NATO's capacities in key strategic enablers. This would not only be extremely useful in practical terms but would also be viewed positively in Washington–

²⁷ NATO. "NATO's Capabilities." 2024.

²⁸ Arnold, Ed. RUSI. "NATO at 75: Curb the Celebrations to Focus on Looming Security Challenges." 2024.

²⁹ Osborne, Tony. Aviation Week Network. "NATO Selects Boeing E-7 For AWACS Modernization." 2023.

regardless of the administration. Contributing to real burden shifting and would demonstrate a step-change in Czech strategic thinking, positioning and leadership.

Jointly Building Non-Nuclear Strategic Strike Capability

The CCCAF (p.9) argues that “the importance of means for rapid, precise and destructive action is growing.” Experts agree that this has been one of the key lessons from the high-intensity, state on state conflict seen in Russia’s war on Ukraine. As Fabian Hoffmann writes: “the Russia-Ukraine war demonstrates the enormous utility of long-range strike weapons in modern wars. Long-range strike weapons can perform a range of key tactical, operational, and strategic functions” in both offensive and defensive capacity”.³⁰ Hoffman continues by noting that there is “little doubt that conventional missile technologies have become a core capability of modern war. Long-range strike weapons facilitate offensive and defensive manoeuvres on the battlefield and can, under certain circumstances, create the conditions of victory independently of the warfighting effort along the front line.”³¹

Long-range precision strike weapons such as the Storm Shadow/SCALP EG cruise missile, as well as the M-142 HIMARS rocket artillery system, especially when equipped with the ATACMS manoeuvring missile, have proven their worth in Ukraine and are much in demand, leaving little wonder as to why Ukraine also wants the Taurus cruise missile to be sent by Germany. Poland and the Baltic states have ordered considerable quantities of HIMARS and ATACMs from the US and recent comments from senior military figures at security conferences in the region have repeatedly confirmed how necessary they see this as being.³²

Yet, beyond HIMARS and other Guided Multiple Launch Rocket Systems (GMLRS), there is a recognised need for longer-range, more powerful precision strike weapons, which while *not* armed with nuclear warheads can nonetheless have the kind of ‘strategic level’ effects

³⁰ Hoffmann, Fabian. CNA. “Strategic Stability and the Ukraine War. Implications of Conventional Missile Technologies.” 2024.

³¹ Hoffmann, Fabian. CNA. „Strategic Stability and the Ukraine War. Implications of Conventional Missile Technologies.” 2024.

³² Discussions and presentations at Lennart Meri Conference 2024, Tallinn; PISM Strategic Ark 2024, Warsaw; Transatlantic Defence Forum 2024, Šanov.

normally associated with atomic weapons. According to Hoffmann,³³ a leading authority on the topic, these effects come from the ability of these weapons to fulfil different types of function, which he categorises as (minus 'Counter-Population' effects which do not conform to how NATO wants to fight):

- **Strategic Interdiction:** targeting key nodes of production, electricity, access to raw materials, infrastructure and supply nodes to undermine an opponent's war-fighting capacity.
- **Counterforce:** targeting enemy military capabilities, potentially including nuclear or other strategic weapons capabilities to render the enemy defenceless.
- **Counter-leadership:** targeting opponents' government and governance capacity to induce strategic paralysis or degradation.

As Łukasz Kulesa has argued, these capabilities are perhaps especially valuable for smaller states because they offset conventional and strategic asymmetries that may otherwise produce overmatches that could lead to reckless and unprovoked aggression.³⁴ Holding at risk Russia's military, governance and war fighting capacity through the employment of massed, powerful long-range precision strike weapons provides a tool to manage escalation, enhance NATO's deterrence as well as its combat power.

This logic applies to weapons like the cruise missiles noted above and, even more so to the modern, US AGM-158 JASSM air-launched stealthy cruise missile and its Tomahawk sea-launched cruise missile. Poland has placed an order for more than 800 JASSMs, which it aims to integrate with its F-35 and F-16 aircraft.³⁵ Warsaw has also expressed interest in Tomahawks which could be launched from the country's nascent submarine fleet as well as surface vessels that it plans to equip for such tasks from 2028.³⁶

³³ Hoffmann, Fabian. "The strategic-level effects of long-range strike weapons: A framework for analysis." 2024.

³⁴ Kulesa, Łukasz. 2020. "Operationalizing the 'Polish Fangs': Poland and long-range precision strike.

³⁵ Gwadera, Zuzanna. IISS. "Poland set to bolster its long-range strike capability." 2024.

³⁶ Gwadera, Zuzanna. IISS. "Poland set to bolster its long-range strike capability." 2024.

Czechia, like much of the rest of Europe, lacks both rocket artillery and cruise missiles.³⁷ The CCAF acknowledges this and states that building capacity in long-range precision fires is a priority. When doing so, Czechia should bear allies and their needs, as well as its own, firmly in mind. Knowing that Warsaw is welcoming contributions (ideally from EU funds) to support its massive rearmament - Poland's defence spending has risen to well over 4% of GDP³⁸ - Prague could find ways to help. This could be through direct contributions to Warsaw's missile procurement, perhaps in exchange for operational control over or Czech-stationing of a proportion of the missiles. Czechia could also try to piggy-back on Poland's JASSM order to acquire missiles of its own at potentially cost-advantage, even if this is unlikely due to capacity constraints.³⁹

Alternatively, Prague could, in concert with Warsaw, Vilnius, Tallinn and others (potentially including an increasingly hawkish and rapidly re-arming Stockholm), push for the expected new EU armaments/ defence industry commissioner to prioritise long-range precision strike by both helping to fund existing orders and helping countries form coalitions to place new orders with European companies⁴⁰ - such as for MBDA's new generation 'future cruise' missile.⁴¹

Large upfront, multi-country orders would incentivise companies to swiftly invest in the capacity to produce more quickly and at scale. Choosing this option would raise the likelihood of broadening the coalition to include other allies - and Czechia should move fast. Finland has already placed orders for JASSMs⁴² and Germany, France, Italy and Poland have just formed a coalition to explore joint production and procurement of hypersonic missiles.⁴³ Czechia should explore initiating a further coalition of the willing to create a special fund for joint cruise-missile procurement, which could also be

³⁷ Hoffmann, Fabian. War on Rocks. "Europe's Missile Conundrum." 2023.

³⁸ NATO Press Release, "Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries (2014-2024)." 2024.

³⁹ Wolfe, Frank. Defense Daily. "USAF Requests \$711 Million for 525 "Max Production" of JASSM-ER." 2021.

⁴⁰ Hoffmann, Fabian. War on Rocks. "Europe's Missile Conundrum." 2023.

⁴¹ Allison, George. UKDJ. "MOD confirm new cruise missile to enter service in 2028." 2024.

⁴² YLE. "Finland acquiring long-range JASSM cruise missiles." 2024.

⁴³ Gutschker, Thomas. Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung. 2024. „Eine neue Waffe, die Moskau treffen könnte.“

coordinated through NATO in a similar way to recent Airborne early warning⁴⁴ and Patriot missile⁴⁵ orders.

There would, also be another, less obvious option for Czechia to help build Euro-NATO's strategic capacity. As Charlie-Salonus Pasternak has pointed out,⁴⁶ even having the missiles and the platforms to launch them from may not be enough for small states to employ them for strategic effect – because they lack key enablers, especially Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance. As Czechia should anyway contribute to developing these capacities, Prague could explore whether it would be possible to use contributions to enablers to secure a quid pro quo in terms of operational control over a proportion of Poland's or other countries missiles. With Warsaw or others, Prague could also explore the possibility of a *'non-nuclear sharing'* arrangement by which missiles from other countries, perhaps jointly procured, would be stationed on Czech territory and launched from Czech platforms such as its incoming F-35s. This would have the additional effect of further dispersing NSATO's strategic non-nuclear capabilities, increasing their survivability in a conflict situation.

Regardless of which options are preferred, Czechia should continue act on its prioritisation of boosting its own or NATO's long-range precision strike capability and should find ways to connect with allies' positioning, procurement and priorities in order to maximise the strategic effectiveness of its chosen course of action.

More Defence Spending

For capability building to be meaningful – in basic but essential aspects, but also for upgrading enablers, air defence and to develop a non-nuclear strategic strike force - further investment in defence will be required. Given the priority the Czech government affords to security and the threat picture that it sees, Prague should seek to raise its financial commitment to 2.5% of GDP, which anyway seems a good bet to be the next

44 Tirpak, John. Air & Space Forces Magazine. "NATO Picks E-7 as Its New AWACS; Six Aircraft to Start." 2023.

45 NATO. "NATO to buy 1,000 Patriot missiles to enhance Allies' air defences" 2024.

46 Salonus-Pasternak, Charly. The Nonproliferation Review. "Friends with (some) benefits: how non-allied Sweden and Finland view long-range conventional precision strike." 2020.

target level spending target required for allies (up from the current 2%), so getting ahead of the game is a good idea. On current levels of GDP, this would mean raising spending to around 8.5bn USD or 7.93bn EUR per year.

In fact, Czechia should follow the lead of Poland, Estonia and other CEE allies that have already committed to 3% of GDP defence spending or more and should lay out a path to do this, taking account of the capability priorities advanced in this section. Increasing defence spending to around 10bn USD/ 9.33bn EUR per year would help stand Czechia in higher political esteem with any future US administration and across NATO – provided this is targeted at capabilities the European pillar really needs, such as those detailed in this report. If handled well by the Czech government, this increased defence spending and the esteem it would bring could be used to increase Prague’s political clout and would set the tone for others on the continent to follow.

Prague should also, however, push for spending on defence to take account of connectivity as well as capability needs. Without proper connectivity, the European pillar of NATO will not be able to leverage increased capability and will lack the required combat power to deter Russia. This may also help to secure the spending politically, as upgrading rail capacity and quality, for example, would also have civilian benefits. Careful accounting for this would, however, be necessary to ensure the necessary military capabilities and enablers are in fact procured – accounting fixes deter no one.

More Connected: Nuclear Sharing & Enhanced Military Mobility

Such a shift in mindset, to strategic thinking, with allies and the alliance firmly in mind, would also lend itself to addressing other key issues for the European pillar of NATO – and doing so would help Prague to become a strategic, continental security contributor. As well as building the kind of shared enablers and non-nuclear strategic missile capabilities discussed above, Czechia should, in particular, explore how it could better contribute to boosting CEE-NATO’s participation in nuclear sharing, and to meaningfully improving cross-border and in-country military mobility.

Nuclear Sharing

Nuclear weapons remain a key element of NATO's deterrence in Europe.⁴⁷ NATO members, including Czechia, emphasise that, as long as there are nuclear weapons in the world, NATO will be a nuclear alliance. In addition to the 'strategic' nuclear forces (generally understood to be the Intercontinental Ballistic Missile forces of the UK and US in addition to France's independent deterrent), 'non-strategic' or 'tactical' weapons also play a role. This non-strategic nuclear capability is provided by the US B61 gravity bombs that are 'shared' - forward deployed - with several allies (Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Turkey), which would employ the weapons via certified 'dual capable' aircraft (DCA). In total, it is generally thought that there are around one hundred B-61s deployed around Europe.⁴⁸

There is a notable absence of CEE allies among this group which, according to NATO, serves as a "vital interconnection of the alliance."⁴⁹ Poland already indicated that it would be ready – and willing – to join the group of nuclear sharing states in 2022 and then Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki reiterated formally declared this desire in 2023. National Security Advisor Jacek Siewiera noted his country's intent to have its F-35s, which will be deployed in 2024 and 2025 certified to use B61-12 nuclear bombs.⁵⁰ This stance was reiterated by Polish President Duda in April 2024.

Some analysts argue that,⁵¹ while there would be potential benefits with regard to dispersal and thus potential survivability of forces, the main value of Poland formally participating would be in terms of deterrence signalling, or would be political. Were Washington to support such a move, it would underline US commitment to extended deterrence and defence of the Eastern flank to Moscow. It could also be considered a proportionate response by NATO to Russian forward deployment of tactical nuclear weapons in Belarus. Joining the nuclear sharing club would also allow Poland to

⁴⁷ NATO. "NATO's nuclear deterrence policy and forces." 2023.

⁴⁸ Centre for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation. "Fact Sheet: United States Non-Strategic Nuclear Weapons." 2024.

⁴⁹ NATO. "NATO's nuclear deterrence policy and forces." 2023

⁵⁰ IISS. "Poland's bid to participate in NATO nuclear sharing." 2023.

⁵¹ IISS. "Poland's bid to participate in NATO nuclear sharing." 2023.

participate in a greater range of NATO activities, including nuclear aspects of exercises – and would recognise the country’s growing strategic role.

There have been calls for Czechia to also participate in nuclear sharing⁵² but, even if these arguments have merit from the perspective of bolstering Czechia’s security contribution, they have yet to gain serious traction in Prague. Nonetheless, the value of having CEE allies which largely share Czechia’s threat perception, such as Poland, participate in nuclear sharing could be considerable.

There are, however, other ways to help strengthen NATO (nuclear) deterrence in CEE without participating in nuclear sharing as such. Czechia and others who may support Poland’s move should consider how to integrate it, politically and in cooperation with allies, with the joint build-up of the enablers and non-nuclear strategic capabilities noted above. As a IISS report argues⁵³, countries including Poland (but this would also be applicable to Czechia) could:

“work with the US and Lockheed Martin to make changes to their F-35As, or work unilaterally to upgrade its air bases without triggering a debate within NATO. This would provide SACEUR with additional military capabilities without engaging in what is likely to be a difficult and fraught attempt to change the geography of NATO’s nuclear storage to include permanent stationing of B61s.”

The question of why it would be ‘difficult and fraught’ to extend a vital NATO interconnection to CEE allies, should be addressed (and overcome), though there is not scope to do so here. Nonetheless, Prague could also explore NATO designating several Czech airfields as ‘Dispersed Operating Bases’, from which Dual Capable aircraft could operate and which would be of practical use as this would “complicate Russian targeting”

⁵² Halas, Matus. “A Manifesto For Czech Membership In Nato’s Nuclear Sharing Club - Analyses IIR.” 2023.

⁵³ IISS. “Poland’s bid to participate in NATO nuclear sharing.” 2023.

and increase survivability of NATO assets. It would, however, lack the immediate political upgrade that joining the nuclear sharing club would provide.

Another option suggested by some analysts in Washington,⁵⁴ given the questionable practical value of nuclear gravity bombs, would be for Czechia and other European allies to pursue the development of nuclear capable cruise missile options, with mobile ground launched capabilities filling a particular gap in European-NATO's flexible response capacity. This should be a different type of missile than for the non-nuclear strategic options discussed above to avoid potentially dangerous confusion.

Even if this were feasible, which it currently is not, given the likely political difficulties of taking such a step (Washington would almost certainly oppose it), and the potential for Russian coercion in the time before it was ready, the immediate priority should be developing the non-nuclear strategic capabilities, enablers and conventional capabilities. Mobile ground launched capabilities for the non-nuclear long-range strike missiles would, nonetheless, be an option worth exploring. Overall, the key point is that should Poland or other Eastern flank states push for participation in nuclear sharing, Czechia should strongly support them – and consider seriously whether to try and join them.

Enhanced Military Mobility

Czechia's geographical position makes it a key "transit and host country for Allied forces" in the event of an increased threat – as both its National Security and Defence strategies note. The CCCAF (p.7) asserts that ensuring this role will have the same emphasis as building up the country's combat capacity. Yet, there remains both scope and need for further improvement of Czechia's capacity to fulfil this role and, especially on military mobility, to help allies do the same, which would also help grow Prague's strategic clout.

Hosting forces so that Czechia can act as a key staging point requires investment in infrastructure and ensuring supply needs can be met, as well as having necessary storage capacities and even prepositioned stocks in place. Exercising the new NATO regional plans with this in mind will be key to optimising these aspects of heightened

⁵⁴ Interviews with US experts in Washington and Tallinn, February and May 2024.

deterrence – and lessons should be drawn from the recent Steadfast Defender exercise where possible. It is already certain that Czechia needs to field further air defence capacities to protect resting and transiting troops. The key Czech defence and security documents recognise all of these needs and set out to address them, although follow up and implementation checks will be required.

On military mobility, the National Defence Strategy (p8)⁵⁵ recognises the need for “a robust transport infrastructure of adequate capacity” but the plans to deliver this are vaguer, partly because, as the National Security Strategy (p25) acknowledges, “some aspects of military mobility are outside the Defence Ministry’s remit and require cooperation of other bodies of the state and public administration.”

Despite a stated ambition to institute a ‘whole of government approach’, the Czech situation mirrors that across European NATO states, where military mobility is recognised as a key weakness, but little has been done to make meaningful progress on improving it. As a number of extant and forthcoming reports note, there are at least three main issues that need to be tackled for Europe to get ‘up to speed’ and at the volume require to properly underpin our deterrence: i) sufficient transport infrastructure and rolling stock; ii) streamlined and harmonised bureaucratic procedures; iii) cyber-resilience.

A 2019 report concluded that Czechia’s road transport network was “not yet aligned with the requirements and needs of the Army of the Czech Republic” and it is safe to assume that the greatly increased transit volume required for current levels of effective deterrence mean that this is still not the case.⁵⁶ This should be assessed, and necessary improvements should be identified, not least to bridges in key locations.

The rail network and rolling stock must, nonetheless, be *the* priority – as rail would be by far the most important means of moving heavy military equipment, fast and at the scale required for defence and deterrence of on NATO’s Eastern flank. Germany is the key to European military mobility and Czechia hosts potentially key rail links running from Germany (from Bavaria as well as from Saxony). These Czech lines provide alternative

⁵⁵ Ministry of Defence of the Czech Republic. “The Defence Strategy of the Czech Republic”. 2023.

⁵⁶ Krc, Miroslav. “Operation Preparation of the State Territory and Transport.” 2019.

West-East routes to ensure mobility from Germany into Poland and would help disperse forces and complicate Russian targeting, as well as providing another way to the Ukrainian border via Slovakia. As a CEPA study⁵⁷ shows, Czechia would also provide part of the key route from Germany in the Northwest, via Slovakia and Hungary to Romania and the South-Eastern flank.

It is not clear how prepared Czechia's rail network is currently to deal with the large volumes of heavy equipment and troops that would need to move through the country. As the CEPA report's authors – Ben Hodges, Heinrich Brauss and Julian Lindley-French – argue, each NATO state should undertake a comprehensive infrastructure assessment that would identify urgent and important investment needs.⁵⁸ Czechia should complete its assessment as a matter of urgency and should integrate the findings with its ongoing projects to improve connectivity with the German states of Bavaria and Saxony, as well as with its other neighbours – critically Poland, but also Slovakia. Czechia also needs to ensure that it has the necessary legal frameworks in place for foreign troops to remain on its territory for extended periods of time.

What is clear, is the inadequate state of Germany's own rail network and rolling stock. As a forthcoming DGAP report shows,⁵⁹ Germany's rail network requires up to 88bn EUR of urgent investment to bring track, bridges and tunnels up to the necessary standard (including to carry heavy military equipment), with at least 18bn of that currently unfunded. There is also a serious shortage of the flat-bed wagons that are needed to transport MBTs, IFVs, SPGs and other heavy equipment. These issues are compounded by bureaucratic obstacles within Germany (as well as in crossing into and out of Germany), and by serious cyber-security issues on the rail network.

⁵⁷ Brauss, Heinrich, Hodges, Ben, and Lindley-French, Julian. "The CEPA Military Mobility Project". 2021.

⁵⁸ Brauss, Heinrich, Hodges, Ben, and Lindley-French, Julian. "The CEPA Military Mobility Project". 2021.

⁵⁹ ⁵⁹ Hartmann, Jannik. DGAP Policy Brief. "Military Mobility – Getting Germany's Transport Infrastructure Up To Speed." 2024. (The author of the current article contributed to the DGAP report).

Germany's 'linchpin' status means that these inadequacies are not only a German problem but one that affects all allies as it impedes defence and deterrence and is, thus, something that allies should help Berlin to solve. Some allies are already making a start: in January 2024, the Netherlands and Poland announced a joint initiative with Germany to create a "military mobility corridor" to speed movement through the three countries.⁶⁰ Czechia should seek to join this initiative without delay and should then play a full role in its implementation on the two key routes that would be under Prague's jurisdiction (West-Northeast; West-Southeast).

Prague can also take other steps. The Czech government - in concert with Poland, the Netherlands and Lithuania (where Germany will permanently station a brigade) as well as other allies that rely on German military mobility (e.g. UK, Sweden, Norway, Latvia, Romania) - should all ensure the Berlin is clear about the need to address the infrastructure shortcomings *from an alliance perspective*. Common funding could also be sought to help speed this process along. Czechia could also offer to buy or lease a large number of flat-bed wagons and should seek consortium partners to chip in and get the number up to the one thousand or so which is the minimum amount estimated as necessary.⁶¹ These could be operated in joint ventures with German, Polish and Dutch railway operators (Czech railways already has joint ventures with Deutsche Bahn [Germany] and PKP [Poland] including on rolling stock leasing).

Czechia could also approach the Netherlands about working together to genuinely reinvigorate the EU's PESCO military mobility project, which is coordinated by The Hague, but which had its funding drastically cut (from 6.5bn EUR to 1.69bn EUR) and which did not get the necessary political prioritisation in other member state capitals. Even though a further 807m EUR was added in 2024,⁶² this is not a sum that is remotely sufficient to meet Europe's military mobility needs.

⁶⁰ Ruitenbergh, Rudy. Defense News. "Europeans set up corridor for rushing NATO troops eastward." 2024.

⁶¹ Hartmann, Jannik. DGAP Policy Brief. "Military Mobility - Getting Germany's Transport Infrastructure Up To Speed." 2024. (The author of the current article contributed to this DGAP report).

⁶² Chihaiia, Mihai Sebastian. EPC. "Advancing military mobility in Europe: An uphill battle." 2023.

Nor, as a damning EPC report shows, is the level of ambition in the PESCO project or the 'EU Action Plan 2.0' on military anywhere near high enough with regard to overcoming bureaucracy.⁶³ In an almost parodic reflection of the lack of seriousness with which this issue has been dealt with, the EU's aim was to *get to* a situation where requests for cross-border military transport were processed within *five working days*. Both the CEPA and DGAP reports call for this to be reduced to 3 days (including weekends!) as standard, thus harmonising with NATO's target - and for urgent requests to be facilitated faster.

On both overcoming bureaucracy and upping investment, Czechia could work with Poland, Germany and the Netherlands - perhaps also bringing in Belgium (given the importance of the port of Antwerp) and Lithuania and Romania as frontline states (Slovakia and Hungary may be more problematic due to the problematic political orientation of these states' governments) - to create a new coalition to prioritise these issues in the new European Commission work programme. They should push, inter alia, for both the 'Connecting Europe Fund' and the Military Mobility fund to be increased - and better coordinated. Raising common European debt for this purpose, via Eurobonds as part of increased common defence spending should be explored - and if not viable the other means should be found.

These same countries could also work together (with other interested member states) to improve cyber security and cyber-resilience - a key need identified by both the CEPA and DGAP reports. Jannik Hartmann highlights the physical and cyber-attacks that have targeted Deutsche Bahn, as well as the German rail operator's reliance on Chinese technology, all of which also create issues for Germany's neighbours and allies⁶⁴. Czechia has experienced repeated Russian cyber-attacks on its rail network,⁶⁵ including on its signalling and capacity allocation systems. Again, EU-NATO Coordination can play a role - as both organisations agree military mobility should be a priority.⁶⁶ Czechia should join

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Hartmann, Jannik. DGAP Policy Brief. "Military Mobility - Getting Germany's Transport Infrastructure Up To Speed." 2024. (The author of the current piece contributed to the DGAP report).

⁶⁵ Financial Times. „Russia is trying to sabotage European railways, warns Prague.” 2024.

⁶⁶ Tomšíček Josef. Ministry of Defence & Armed Forces of the Czech Republic. „Military mobility: a key priority for EU and NATO, experts agreed in Prague.” 2022.

the member states leading the way on this, all of whom should coordinate with both NATO's cyber defence centre of excellence as well as the EU Cyber Security Agency.

By again showing that it understands the networked, cross-border challenge nature of the challenge European-NATO faces and the need to act on that in a joined-up way, rather than just taking care of national capabilities, Czechia would become a better ally and exert greater influence.

Conclusion – More Credible: Reward & Rely on CEE Leadership to Rebalance NATO

Czechia, like other CEE countries can only truly realise this leadership and strategic potential if others act upon it – i.e. if it is followed or at least, encouraged to continue and its strategic contribution is not only recognised but better rewarded, including through securing top positions in the alliance. So far, the picture is mixed in this regard. The Baltic states have been lauded by US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken as “leading the way” in NATO.⁶⁷ Yet, when it came to choosing a new Secretary General for the alliance, the widely touted Estonian PM Kaja Kallas was overlooked in favour of (now) former Dutch PM Mark Rutte. According to allied government sources, good candidates have been overlooked for other positions as well.⁶⁸

As Kallas joked in 2023, ‘they say the new NATO Secretary General should be a woman and come from a newer member state, which should also be a country that meets the 2% [defence spending] target. And so, the logical conclusion is that it should be Mark Rutte’. The joke being that, while Rutte met none of these conditions, Kallas met all three. This snub seemed almost designed to assert the primacy of the older NATO states over those still considered ‘newcomers’, despite being part of the alliance for one third of its history. This led to recriminations about the ongoing hierarchies at work in core Western institutions, to the detriment of CEE.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Latvian Radio and Television. LSM. “Blinken: Baltic States are ‘leading the way in NATO’. 2024.

⁶⁸ Conversations with NATO state representatives, June 2024.

⁶⁹ Lau, Stuart and Moens, Barbara. Politico. “In the race for the top EU, NATO jobs Eastern Europe asks: ‘Are we equals or not?’ 2024.

Now, however, is the time for Central and East Europeans to insist on their belonging, to refuse any attempt to reimpose second class status and, instead, to assert the right to lead - for the good of the alliance. CEE NATO states have been right about the Russian threat and have been at the forefront of support for Ukraine. Estonia has spent 1.6% of its GDP on supplying Ukraine⁷⁰, has pledged 0.25% of GDP per year going forward and is up to 3.4% on defence.⁷¹ Warsaw leads even Tallinn on defence spending (4.34%) and is undertaking the kind of armament programme needed for its military to become the large capable force that NATO needs at its heart – and which Germany, for example, is still only talking about. Poland is also (as noted above) developing strategic capabilities. Lithuania has pioneered perhaps the most comprehensive vision of all – increased defence spending, boosting resilience and fortifying itself including by permanently hosting a German brigade, being consistently uncompromising *on* Russia and *for* Ukraine – as well as showing how to stand up to China in geoeconomics as well as geopolitics.

At the time of writing, it seems as though each of these countries will secure good European Commission positions for their candidates. Even if this is not formally how appointments work, it is understood that EU and NATO positions are considered as part of one picture, but the NATO snub still rankles and needs to be addressed when Rutte takes the reins.

Yet, Czechia too has shown real leadership. It was, in fact, the first country to send MBTs to Ukraine (in March 2024) and its PM was among the first group (with Poland and Slovenia) to visit Kyiv after the full-scale invasion. Moreover, Czechia was the one to break the ammunition impasse. After the EU's 'Million shells' initiative had stalled and, at a time when US aid was stuck in Congress, Ukraine was being outgunned 5:1 and facing a serious morale issue, but Prague had a plan. Innovatively sourcing shells from all over the world, the Czech ammunition initiative collected nearly a million rounds and quickly gathered financial support from European allies, notably Denmark and the Netherlands. All of these

⁷⁰ IFW Kiel Institute for World Economy. "Ukraine Support Tracker." 2024.

⁷¹ NATO Press Release, "Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries (2014-2024). 2024.

initiatives built further on the enhanced reputation Czechia had gained from its successful Presidency of the EU in the second half of 2022.⁷²

Now that Czechia's defence investment programme has kicked into gear and the country has well met the NATO spending target, this is the kind of leadership that should be recognised – and rewarded. Both Czech and Dutch officials claim that (likely) incoming Secretary General Rutte is 'well aware'⁷³ of the need to rebalance the alliance to have greater representation in key positions for CEE. Czechia has shown that it has officials of the calibre to do an excellent job in high-level NATO positions – not least those close to the ammunition initiative and masterminding the country's re-armament such as current and former Deputy Defence Ministers Jan Jireš and Jan Havránek, and Special Representative for Ukraine Tomáš Kopečný. They or other well-qualified compatriots should be in the running for an Assistant Secretary General position in a re-organised NATO leadership. Poland would also be justified in seeking high office for one of its candidates.

It is true that Czechia will need to maintain its increased defence spending to sustain this esteem. Yet it is also true that doing so in the ways outlined in this paper would do far more than that. If Czechia manages this, it would, in concert with allies, build a European Pillar of NATO worthy of the name. Moreover, if CEE leadership were also recognised in other ways, it would bring the part of the alliance in which Europe is most positive, most alive, into the driving seat of 'Euro-NATO', which would give the best chance of securing its future. CEE, Czechia included, is also the part of Europe that is in some ways most tied to though also perhaps most able to deal with the US regardless of the President. Its defence spending helps with this but now is the time for CEE allies, not least Czechia to start looking out for the interests of the alliance as a whole.

By building the six key elements of the European Pillar of NATO – and by doing so in ways that attended to not only Europe's capability but also its connectivity – Czechia and CEE allies would become continental level strategic security providers. At a time when Western

⁷² Radio Prague International. "Czechs in the EU: Czechia's performance at the helm of the EU." 2024.

⁷³ Background conversations with Dutch and Czech officials, March, April and May 2024.

European allies are hesitating or struggling to match rhetoric to reality, this is what Europe needs. If it sets a friendly competitive example for those older NATO states, which encourages them to do more, then so much the better.

NATO, in general, needs to become more comfortable with saying what allies need to do, rather than indulging their particular inadequacies and excuses. In the words of RUSI's Ed Arnold, the alliance needs to be "prescriptive not descriptive" about what capabilities it needs – and who should provide them.⁷⁴ CEE states should not be shy about saying what the alliance needs from its other European members – from Spain, for example, as well as from Germany, France and the UK.

If such prescription is to be enacted, however, cooperation is required on EU as well as NATO levels. This provides another forum for CEE states to assert themselves - not least in the definition and allocation of portfolios in the next European Commission, in the strategic priorities of the EU for the next five years, as well as in assigning funds to ensure that Europe has the means to purchase the means to defend itself. It is also in US interests for this to happen and so Washington should swing behind those allies who are most likely to make this happen – as well as most likely to hold down the Eastern flank and uphold deterrence in Europe. This is what Washington has been asking for and so, rather than reflexively turning to Berlin first, it should look to the allies that can – and are - doing the heavy lifting on capability development.

NATO needs a capable and connected European pillar to enact the burden-shifting that is required to keep the alliance together. The greatest chance of achieving that is by empowering its Central and East European allies, including Czechia, and not only rewarding but being comfortable relying on the leadership they provide. If they continue to do so, the rebalancing of the alliance that will ensue will, in itself, make NATO more credible and also set in train the other processes that credible defence and deterrence require.

⁷⁴ Arnold, Ed. RUSI. "NATO at 75: Curb the Celebrations to Focus on Looming Security Challenges." 2024.

Recommendations to Czechia's Government to Maximise Strategic Contribution and Influence in NATO by Helping to Build the European Capabilities Pillar

I. Fully implement plans to build rounded National Capability Profile including logistics:

1. Ensure, in accordance with the CCCAF plan, the procurement of necessary logistics capabilities, core stocks (including munitions and supplies), and recruitment, retention and training of sufficient troops and active reserves to complement high-profile acquisitions.
2. Cover this capability build-out with already assigned funding but explore additional logistics procurement jointly with European allies, via either NATO or EU channels.

II. Act to enhance Military Mobility in Czechia and through allied states on key routes:

3. Conduct a comprehensive infrastructure investment, led by the Office of the Government, to identify urgent and important investment needs for enhancing military mobility – and then create a whole-of-government plan to fund and implement necessary measures.
4. Join the Netherlands-Germany-Poland 'Military Mobility Corridor' at the earliest opportunity.
5. Propose to these allies (NL-DE-PL) to jointly procure or lease at least one thousand flat-bed wagons suitable for the transport of heavy military equipment through the corridor.

6. Propose to the Netherlands to jointly lead a revitalised PESCO project on military mobility, focused on ensuring (maximum) 3-day cross-border mobility request approval, infrastructure and rolling stock investment, and cyber resilience.
7. Harmonise the revitalised PESCO Military Mobility project with the work of the new Defence Industry Commissioner and EU Strategic Agenda, including to secure increased funding for 'dual use' improvements to transport networks from the 'Connecting Europe Fund'.

III. Kick-start and take responsibility for developing European Strategic Enablers:

8. Propose - and offer to lead - a comprehensive, regionalised review of European-NATO available/assigned enablers and identify costed, prioritised needs for investment and procurement to fill gaps and build capacity and capability.
9. Propose to lead on or coordinate at least one of the projects to develop these priority enabler needs NATO's Central Region/ Eastern Flank, ideally to be employable before 2030.
10. Particularly prioritise and lead on enablers that support and complement the development of massed long-range strike capability, such as Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance, Airborne Warning and Control, and Rapid Networked Targeting.

IV. Help build a Serious European-NATO, including CEE-NATO, Strategic Strike Capability:

11. Explore options for coordinated build-up of mass long-range non-nuclear strategic strike capabilities in coordination with allies, including Poland, but also with other allies such as UK, France, Germany, Sweden and the Baltic states.
12. Contribute substantially, financially to this either by funding parts of existing procurement, contributing more to build-up enablers (in place of an ally which would focus on missile procurement for joint use) or, better, by launching new joint procurement of cruise missiles.

13. Push for non-nuclear strategic strike to be a priority for the new EU Defence Industry Commissioner and explore common procurement of next generation cruise missiles by coalitions of willing EU states from European producers. Simultaneously explore NATO joint procurement options and harmonise or choose between these two tracks.
14. Complement procurement of long-range strike missile systems with the build-up of enablers and sharing of procurement and capabilities (enablers and missiles) with involved allies.

V. Contribute to Bolstering European Air Defence Capabilities:

15. Continue to procure further air defence assets in order to protect more of Czech and European territory, critical infrastructure and civilian targets, as well as to ensure protection of troops for both combat and transit through Czechia. This should proceed in accordance with the plan and prioritisation in CCCAF and with already assigned funds.
16. Integrate this procurement and any additional air defence procurement with ESSI. Engaged participation should also be used to push the initiative to take account of French concerns over ballistic missile defence.
17. Push for air defence to be a priority for the new Defence Industry Commissioner, and included in the EU strategic agenda, with potential to assign common funds for increased procurement.

VI. Push for EU Defence Industry Commissioner, Prioritisation and Funding for Armament:

18. Support the creation of an EU Defence Industry Commissioner responsible for accelerating and deepening EU states armament in accordance with European-NATO needs and significantly enhancing the EU Defence-Industrial Base.
19. Ensure that armament is included in the EU strategic agenda for next five years and explore options with EU member states and institutions to increase common funding – for example through Eurobonds or other common debt - for European defence procurement focused on strategic strike, air defence, strategic enablers, military mobility, logistics and core stocks.

VII. Durably Increase Defence Spending and Capability Development

20. Commit, in line with stated strategic priorities, to increase defence spending to 2.5% of GDP by 2027 with focus on strategic enablers, military mobility, air defence and strategic strike.
21. Seek ways to increase defence spending to de facto 3% of GDP by 2030 with inclusion of 'dual use' investment in infrastructure, with same focus areas as above, aimed at maximising contribution to building European pillar of NATO.
22. Tie in projects together with allies at EU and NATO level to ensure strategic investment and capability continuity across political cycles.
23. Learning from the Leopard2 MBT deal, coordinate future procurement with allies and insist on value sharing – for example in setting up missile/ enabler production lines in Czechia.

VIII. Develop CEE participation in NATO nuclear sharing:

24. Support Poland's bid to participate in NATO nuclear sharing.
25. Explore possibilities to have Czech F-35s certified as 'dual capable' and upgrade airfields to nuclear sharing standard, and have other airfields designated 'Dispersed Operating Bases'.
26. Instigate a national expert and political discussion on Czechia joining NATO nuclear sharing.

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