

Analysis of the Strategic Environment of the Czech Republic and its Implications for Defence Policy and the Armed Forces

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Abstract

The paper presents the results of a sectoral analysis of the Czech Republic's security environment and interprets them from the perspective of strategic studies. Its objective is to identify key structural trends shaping the operational and strategic environment and to derive their implications for defence planning, capability development, and the long-term transformation of the Armed Forces of the Czech Republic. The analysis shows that the security environment in last years is characterized by persistent geopolitical instability and accelerating technological change. The rapid diffusion of unmanned systems and artificial intelligence applications is transforming the conduct of warfare and increasing demands for capability modernization, interoperability, and force readiness. At the same time, demographic and societal pressures are deepening, affecting the personnel sustainability of the armed forces and the overall strategic resilience of the state. Economic and environmental factors intensify competition for resources and raise demands for the prioritization of defence investments. The findings confirm the growing interdependence of sectors and the necessity of integrated assessment of the security environment as a foundation for force and capability development.

KEY WORDS: *Security Environment; Defence; Implications; Armed Forces; Sectoral analysis*

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1. Introduction

This text analyzes the strategic security environment of the Czech Republic in 2024 through a sectoral analytical framework and embeds its findings in current debates in the field of strategic studies. Based on the analysis presented in the publication *Security Environment 2024*, the article argues that the defining feature of the current strategic environment is the growing interdependence of military and non-military dynamics [1]. This interconnectedness shows that traditional military-oriented approaches to strategic analysis are not entirely sufficient and the present requires a more integrated understanding of the factors that shape the security environment. Methodologically, the study uses a qualitative sectoral analysis structured across political, military, social, economic, technological and environmental dimensions, complemented by comparative contextualization. The findings point to the interaction of geopolitical instability, technological transformation of warfare and structural social and economic constraints. Methodologically, the study uses a qualitative sectoral analysis structured across political, military, social, economic, technological and environmental dimensions, complemented by comparative contextualization. The findings point to the interaction of geopolitical instability, technological transformation of warfare and structural social and economic constraints.

The European security environment, and the security environment of the Czech Republic as an integral part of it, has undergone a fundamental transformation in the last decade. The return of large-scale interstate conflict, especially in the form of the war in Ukraine, has challenged the assumptions of the post-bipolar security order and reaffirmed the importance of military power and its projection as an instrument of state policy. At the same time, however, the strategic environment is increasingly shaped by factors that go beyond the purely military dimension, including technological innovations, demographic changes, and economic constraints. This dual dynamic creates analytical tension. On the one hand, there is a return to emphasis on deterrence, the ability to wage a long-term high-intensity conflict, and the certain

remilitarization of society associated with these demands. On the other, the importance of the broader context that conditions the effectiveness of military power is ever increasing.

2. Methods

Methodologically, the study uses a qualitative sectoral analysis structured across dimensions, complemented by comparative contextualization. The findings point to the interaction of geopolitical instability, technological transformation of warfare and structural social and economic constraints. The study is theoretically grounded in the sectoral approach to security developed by the Copenhagen School and conceptualizes the security environment as a complex system of interrelated political, military, societal, economic, technological, and environmental factors. Methodologically, the paper employs qualitative strategic analysis combined with selected quantitative indicators and systematic comparison with European and global developments. Emphasis is placed on identifying long-term trends, their impact on the character of conflict, requirements for military capabilities, and the strategic adaptation of the state under conditions of increasing security complexity. The analysis of the Czech Republic's Strategic Environment is based on two main premises. First, the current strategic environment is defined by the increasing interconnectedness of military and non-military factors. Second, including this interconnectedness in strategic analysis allows for a more precise identification of structural constraints and opportunities relevant to defense policy.

A wide range of methods can currently be used when examining the security environment [2]. The analysis used the approach of the Copenhagen School, which represents one of the most comprehensive attempts to expand security analysis and points out that security cannot be reduced to the military dimension. The sectoral approach operationalizes this thesis and allows for the analysis of interactions between individual dimensions. In the analysis of the *Security Environment of the Czech Republic*, this framework is expanded to include the technological dimension as a separate sector, which also reflects its growing importance with regard to the currently ongoing armed conflicts.

3. Results

The analysis of the Czech Republic's Strategic Environment is based on two main premises. First, the current strategic environment is defined by the increasing interconnectedness of military and non-military factors. Second, including this interconnectedness in strategic analysis allows for a more precise identification of structural constraints and opportunities relevant to defense policy. The analysis used the approach of the Copenhagen School, which represents one of the most comprehensive attempts to expand security analysis and points out that security cannot be reduced to the military dimension. The sectoral approach operationalizes this thesis and allows for the analysis of interactions between individual dimensions. In the analysis of the *Security Environment of the Czech Republic*, this framework is expanded to include the technological dimension as a separate sector, which also reflects its growing importance with regard to the currently ongoing armed conflicts.

The strategic security environment of the Czech Republic in 2024 is characterized by the simultaneous action of several structural trends, the interaction of which fundamentally shapes the conditions for security and defense policy and the functioning of the armed forces. It is no longer possible to analyze individual sectors and dimensions relatively separately; current developments show a high degree of interconnectedness, which makes it difficult to clearly identify dominant factors. The most visible manifestation of the transformation of the security environment is the return of intense geopolitical rivalry and the associated conflict in Ukraine. This conflict not only confirmed the continuing importance of conventional military power but also revealed the limits of the assumptions on which the security architecture of Europe after the end of the Cold War was built. In this context, the importance of collective defense and alliance commitments is increasing, which is also reflected in Czech strategic documents, in particular the Defence Strategy of the Czech Republic from 2023 [3]. At the same time, reducing the current development to a mere return of geopolitics does not fully capture its complex character. Geopolitical dynamics are taking place in an environment that is fundamentally different from the past, precisely due to the influence of other structural factors.

One of the most significant of these is the technological transformation of the conduct of armed conflicts. The expansion of unmanned systems, advances in artificial intelligence and the digitalization of the battlefield are fundamentally changing the operational environment and the nature of military operations. These changes are not limited to the tactical or operational level but also have broader strategic consequences. Technologies reduce some traditional barriers to entry into conflict and enable actors with limited resources to achieve relatively high combat effectiveness. At the same time, they increase the demands on the adaptability of military organizations and their ability to integrate new resources into existing structures. In the Czech context, this trend is reflected in the Czech Army Construction Concept 2035, however, the current dynamics of technological development indicate that the original planning assumptions may be surpassed in many respects.

Another important factor is social and demographic trends, which represent long-term structural constraints. Population aging and changes in the labor market reduce the availability of human resources for the armed forces and complicate the fulfillment of personnel goals. This problem is not specific to the Czech Republic, but in its case it is particularly pronounced due to the relatively small size of the population and strong competition from the civilian sector. Demographic development, or rather the negative unprecedented decline in the birth rate in the Czech Republic in recent

years, thus gains strategic importance, as it directly affects the state's ability to generate and maintain military capabilities. At the same time, it is related to broader social factors, such as value orientations, perceptions of security and willingness to participate in ensuring the state's defence.

A specific dimension of the social sector is the issue of the resilience of society, which is coming to the forefront of interest in the current security environment both on an analytical and practical level. Resilience cannot be understood only as the ability to passively absorb shocks, but rather as a complex ability of a society to adapt to the effects of external pressures, maintain the functionality of key institutions and actively confront destabilizing influences. In the context of the Czech Republic, this issue is significantly reflected in the area of hybrid threats and information influence, which target the cognitive dimension of security. As the analysis of the cognitive resilience of military personnel shows, the key factors are not only individual critical thinking skills and resistance to manipulation, but also the institutional framework that systematically develops these skills [4]. At the level of the armed forces, resilience is manifested not only in terms of physical readiness, but increasingly also in terms of psychological and information.

Empirical studies focused on the resilience of the Czech Army to hybrid action also indicate that this area shows considerable variability and is conditioned by a combination of organizational, cultural and individual factors [5]. This includes, for example, the level of trust in institutions, the quality of internal communication or the ability to identify and interpret information influences. In the broader social context, the role of narratives and their influence on the perception of the security environment cannot be ignored, as shown by the analysis of discourses in Czech society in relation to the war in Ukraine [6]. These narratives can either strengthen social cohesion and resilience, or, conversely, contribute to fragmentation and vulnerability to external influences. An important analytical framework for understanding these processes is also offered by the concept of active measures and information action, which points to the systematic efforts of external actors to influence the cognitive environment of target societies [7]. In this sense, social resilience becomes not only a complement to military power, but an integral part of it, as it directly affects the state's ability to mobilize resources, maintain political support for defense measures, and face long-term pressure. From the perspective of strategic analysis, the social sector – and especially its cognitive dimension – represents a critical area that connects the internal stability of the state with its ability to operate in a security environment. For the Czech Republic, this means the need to systematically develop not only military capabilities, but also broader social resilience, in close connection with the institutional capacities, the educational system and the strategic communication of the state.

The economic dimension further frames the options for responding to the above trends. Although defence spending has increased in the Czech Republic in recent years, its long-term sustainability remains conditional on overall fiscal developments and the competing demands of other public policies. The rising costs of modernising the armed forces, together with the pressure to achieve planned capabilities and fulfil alliance commitments, create an environment in which difficult decisions on resource allocation are necessary. Economic factors thus act not only as constraints, but also shape strategic choices and influence the shape of the state's defence policy.

Last but not least, the environmental dimension contributes to the overall complexity of the security environment. Although its impacts are not primarily evident in the field of defence, they act as a risk multiplier and affect the stability of the wider international environment. The increasing frequency of extreme events and pressure on resources can generate secondary security challenges to which the state must respond, including with the participation of the armed forces, as was the case in the past in the case of large-scale floods. The strategic security environment of the Czech Republic cannot be reduced to a set of isolated challenges, but must be understood as a dynamic and interconnected whole. It is this interconnectedness that represents its defining characteristic and, at the same time, its main analytical challenge.

4. Conclusions

The prepared analysis aims not only to describe the current character of the strategic security environment of the Czech Republic, but above all to grasp it analytically in a way that allows its systematic connection with strategic thinking and defense policy making. In this regard, the key starting point was the use of a sectoral approach inspired by the Copenhagen School, which allows us to go beyond the traditionally dominant military-oriented concept of security and capture a broader set of factors that condition the security reality of the state.

The analysis showed that the Czech security environment cannot be adequately interpreted only through the prism of the return of geopolitical rivalry and conventional conflict, although the war in Ukraine represents its most visible manifestation. This conflict is rather part of a more complex structural development, within which several fundamental trends are taking place simultaneously. Among them, the technological transformation of the conduct of armed conflict occupies a key position, which changes not only the operational character of the conflict, but also broader strategic calculations. At the same time, long-term social and demographic changes are becoming increasingly evident, which limit the state's ability to generate and maintain military capabilities. These factors are further framed by economic constraints and environmental pressures, which together contribute to the growing complexity of the security environment.

One of the findings of this analysis is the increasing degree of interconnectedness between sectors. Security challenges can no longer be understood as isolated phenomena within individual dimensions, but as the result of their mutual interaction. For example, technological developments fundamentally affect military capabilities, but their impacts

are conditioned by economic resources, the institutional capacity of the state and the social willingness to absorb these changes. Similarly, demographic trends have a direct impact on the personnel sustainability of the armed forces, but at the same time affect the broader political and economic priorities of the state. This systemic interconnectedness represents a key analytical conclusion that has fundamental implications for the way in which the security environment is conceptualized and interpreted.

From the perspective of strategic studies, it is becoming clear that traditional analytical frameworks that have focused primarily on the military dimension are no longer sufficient to capture the complexity of the contemporary environment. This does not mean that the importance of military power is weakened, but rather that it needs to be placed in a broader context. In this sense, the sectoral approach does not represent an alternative to strategic thinking, but rather its complement and extension. It allows for the systematic identification of structural conditions that influence the effectiveness of military power, thereby contributing to a more accurate understanding of the strategic environment.

The implications for the defence policy of the Czech Republic and the development of its armed forces from these findings arise primarily at the level of principles, not specific operational measures. First and foremost, it concerns the need to systematically incorporate a comprehensive analysis of the security environment into decision-making processes. Defence planning cannot be based solely on the identification of military threats, but must reflect a broader set of structural factors that influence the long-term sustainability and effectiveness of the armed forces. Furthermore, it is clear that technological transformation requires not only investment in new capabilities, but also institutional and organisational adaptation to enable their effective use. Equally important is the area of human resources, where current demographic trends in particular represent long-term constraints that cannot be addressed solely through traditional recruitment and hiring tools. In a broader perspective, it can be stated that the key challenge for the Czech Republic is not only adaptation to individual security threats, but also the ability to navigate an environment characterized by a high degree of uncertainty and complexity. This places increased demands not only on the armed forces themselves, but also on the analytical and decision-making capacities of the state as a whole. The ability to integrate knowledge across individual sectors and project it into strategic thinking thus becomes one of the key prerequisites for an effective defense policy.

In conclusion, it can be stated that the sectoral approach represents a suitable analytical tool for capturing the current transformation of the security environment. Its main benefit lies in the fact that it allows for the connection of the analysis of the security environment with the requirements of strategic thinking. Thus, it contributes not only to the theoretical discussion within the framework of strategic studies, but also to the practical understanding of the problems facing the defense policy of the Czech Republic in the conditions of the changing security environment.

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