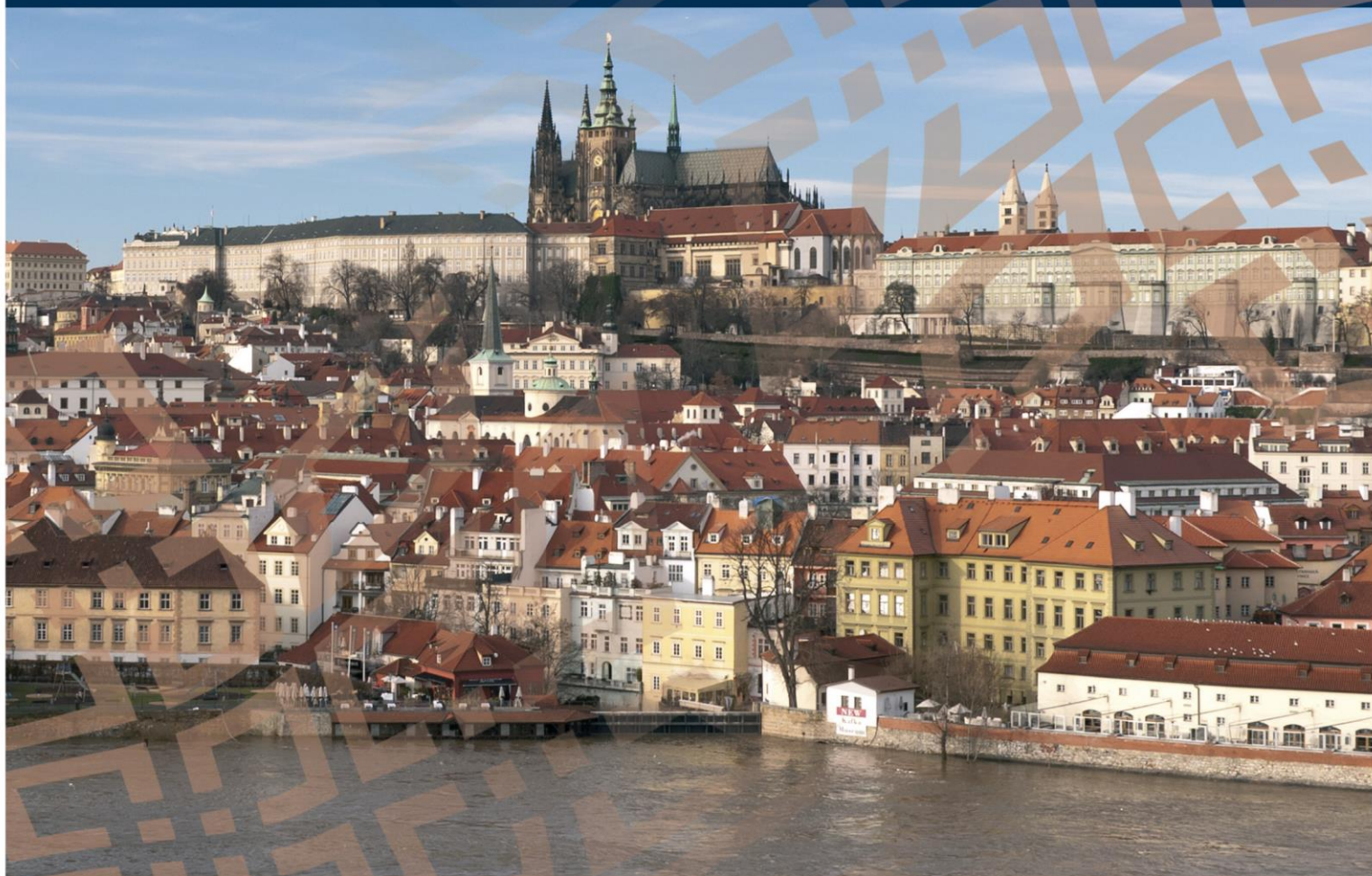




CENTRUM TRANSATLANTICKÝCH VZTAHŮ  
Prague Centre for Transatlantic Relations

# PCTR Newsletter

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## Message from the Director

*Dear readers,*

*Another month full of more or less turbulent news in the field of transatlantic relations is behind us. You may go through them once again in the last section of this Newsletter. As always, we have also completed the Bulletin where you can read detailed information about our events in the past month.*

*We have issued a bilingual publication [Czech – American relations: A roadmap for the future](#) on the occasion of 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Václav Havel's visit to the US. A non-profit organization Zaostřeno, o.p.s. and RWE Česká republika kindly supported this publication which evaluates Czech-US relations from the security, trade, cultural and geopolitical perspectives over the last 25 years. Printed publication can be obtained (for free) at the CEVRO Institute's library (Jungmannova 17, Prague 1).*

*On this occasion, I would also like to invite you to the International Conference „European Jihadists“, which is held on 19<sup>th</sup> March at 5pm in association with International Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT) at IDC College in Herzliya. The event will be held with leading international guests from the Czech Republic, Israel, Germany and Great Britain. More information is available on the [CEVRO Institute website](#).*

*I wish you a pleasant reading of the second PCTR Newsletter issue and I believe that we will meet again at our upcoming events.*

*Yours sincerely,*

*Alexandr Vondra  
Director*

## PCTR Bulletin

A public lecture entitled "Middle East in 2015" organized by Prague Centre for Transatlantic Relations took place on 19<sup>th</sup> February at the CEVRO Institute (CI). **The lecture was held by the leading Israeli security expert General Yaakov Amidror.** The former Czech ambassador to Israel and vice president of the CI Tomas Pojar opened the event and hosted the discussion. **The event was supported by RWE Česká republika.**

General Amidror analyzed current threats in Middle East and spoke about the changes that influenced the security situation in the past year. He pointed out that growing influence of radical Islam resulting in the rise of the Islamic State was



among those most important. The failure of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and consequently in Jordan as well as the rise of Islamism in Turkey also affected the region significantly. Gen. Amidror warned that secular Turkey – as we have known it since the rule of Atatürk – might change under the influence of an organization similar to the Muslim Brotherhood.



According to Mr. Amidror, Iranian nuclear program and all forms of terrorism remain most serious threats to Israel. The country is ready to cooperate with any state in the region that is willing to fight terrorism.

In the discussion after the seminar, the PCTR Director Alexandr Vondra asked the General to describe Israeli position regarding the rise of the Islamic State. Yaakov Amidror explained that unlike Hamas or Hezbollah, IS does not represent a direct threat to Israel. Therefore, Israel sees fighting against Hamas or Hezbollah as more important to its own security. He added there is no chance to defeat the IS without "boots on the ground". Yaakov Amidror also answered questions about Israeli ties with Turkey, UN stance in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Israeli energy policy, current role of Russia in the region and Kurdish position in the conflict with IS.

**We would like to thank our media partners**

the Embassy of the State of Israel in the Czech Republic, Czech-Israeli Chamber of Commerce, erez.cz, shekel.cz and reviewed journal Defense and Strategy. A record from the public lecture is available [here](#).

The first PCTR Club Meeting in the new semester took place on 25<sup>th</sup> February. **Our distinguished guest, European leading expert in the field of energetics and the Ambassador-at-Large for Energy Security of the Czech Republic Vaclav Bartuska, chose a very up-to-date topic "Energetics as a part of economic war".**

Thanks to the "Chatham house" rule, Mr. Bartuska's short opening remarks were followed by a very open and interesting discussion. As usual, the PCTR Director Alexandr Vondra hosted the event. **We would like to thank our partner RWE Česká republika for their support.**



Among others, the PCTR director Alexandr Vondra participated in the panel discussion on the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Václav Havel's visit to the US and the renewal of relations between Czechoslovakia and wUS. The event was held on February at the American cultural center, as a part of the *Our return to the map of the world* series of the Vaclav Havel Library. A video record from the panel discussion is available [here](#). During the event, our bilingual publication and policy paper Czech-American relations: A roadmap for the future were distributed.



## Events in Euro-Atlantic relations (February 2015)

President Barack Obama asked Congress for a base defense budget of \$534 billion in 2016. Mr. Obama also asked for an additional \$51 billion to pay for operations in the conflicts in Iraq and Syria as well as the continued American military presence in Afghanistan. U.S. president also released an updated national security strategy on 6<sup>th</sup> February. Violent extremism, Russian aggression, cyberattacks and climate change were mentioned as the most pressing challenges for U.S. security. Obama underlined that the United States needed "strategic patience and persistence". He reminded the audience that many problems could not be solved with military action. Obama repeated the U.S. commitment to lead an international coalition to defeat Islamic State and work with European allies to isolate Russia due to its support for rebels in Eastern Ukraine.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/03/us/politics/obamas-budget-seeks-534-billion-for-pentagon.html?hpw&rref=us&WT.nav=bottom-well&r=1&module=ArrowsNav&contentCollection=Politics&action=keypress&region=FixedLeft&pgtype=article>,  
<http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/02/06/us-usa-security-rice-idUSKBN0LA0DH20150206>

NATO defense ministers agreed to create a network of command centers in Eastern Europe and to more than double the size of its Rapid Reaction Forces on 5<sup>th</sup> February. The Alliance will establish a new Northeastern regional headquarters in Poland, and a smaller Southeastern headquarters in Romania. Six command centers will be set up in Poland, Romania, Bulgaria and the three Baltic states to plan exercises and organize reinforcements for countries facing an emergency. The size of existing NATO Rapid Reaction Force should more than double from 13,000 to 30,000 soldiers.

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/02/05/us-ukraine-crisis-nato-idUSKBN0L82KK20150205>

NATO defense ministers have appreciated Georgia's progress on its way to become a NATO member. They have also confirmed several arrangements that should help the Caucasian republic to reform and modernize its armed forces. A NATO expert team has been formed to help Georgia with defense reforms. They have also introduced a plan for building a common training and educating center in Tbilisi. The center should be operational by the end of this year. It would serve not only Georgian armed forces, but also NATO member countries and other partner states. The meeting of NATO ministers took place on 5<sup>th</sup> February in Brussels.

[http://www.natoaktual.cz/gruzie-se-priblizila-k-nato-df4-na\\_zpravy.aspx?c=A150205\\_151144\\_na\\_zpravy\\_m00](http://www.natoaktual.cz/gruzie-se-priblizila-k-nato-df4-na_zpravy.aspx?c=A150205_151144_na_zpravy_m00)

Between 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> February world leaders, former and current politicians, as well as media and civil society representatives gathered for the 51<sup>st</sup> Munich Security Conference. The agenda was dedicated to the key challenges that lay ahead in 2015, dominated by the crisis in Ukraine and deteriorating relations between Russia and the West, rise of violent extremism and fight against terrorism, proliferation of nuclear weapons, refugee crisis around the world, situation in the Middle

East as well as climate and energy security challenges. The underlying theme of the conference focused on dangers of global order collapse, its institutions and the principles on which it has been built since the Second World War.

[http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EPRS\\_BRI%282015%29549006](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EPRS_BRI%282015%29549006), <http://www.eventanizer.com/MS2015/MunichSecurityReport2015.pdf>

Washington is embarking on a program that will for the first time allow NATO members to acquire and share American military hardware with members of the Alliance. By doing so, Washington is getting more involved in the NATO Smart Defense Program that is seen as a way to share costs and risks in developing and fielding new weapon systems. NATO allies are seeking mutual cost sharing to maximize purchasing power of their defense budgets. Media released the information on 10<sup>th</sup> February.

<http://www.defensenews.com/story/defense/2015/02/04/nato-weapons-sales-stste-department/22871267/>

The Commanding General of the U.S Army in Europe Ben Hodges announced on 11<sup>th</sup> February that USA would train Ukrainian troops in fight against the Russian-backed separatists. The training mission will start in March, however, the precise place of the training is unknown. According to General Lieutenant Hodges, U.S. army will train Ukrainian troops in security tasks, medical tasks, conducting operations in an environment with limited or disturbed communication lines and protection from Russian and rebel artillery. The possibility of providing Ukraine with weapons remains relevant, as president Obama stated that U.S might send weapons to Ukrainian army in case diplomacy would not work.

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/02/11/us-ukraine-crisis-trainings-idUSKBN0LF1CG20150211>

The highest representatives of Ukraine, Russia, France and Germany agreed on the new truce agreement to stop conflict in Eastern Ukraine on 12<sup>th</sup> February in Minsk. An immediate ceasefire starting on 15<sup>th</sup> February and pulling out of heavy weapons to create a safe zone were the most important points of the document. Besides that, the parties agreed to allow monitoring done by the OSCE, assured amnesty regarding the conflict, secured exchange of captives, assured secure flow of humanitarian aid, renewal of socio-economic ties in Donbas area, recovery of state border control by Ukrainian government, removal of foreign military formations, constitutional reform, elections to regional governments and more intensive work of the contact group.

[http://zpravy.idnes.cz/dokument-text-dohody-z-minsku-ukrajina-rusko-obse-donbas-pz4-/zahranicni.aspx?c=A150212\\_151911\\_zahranicni\\_vez](http://zpravy.idnes.cz/dokument-text-dohody-z-minsku-ukrajina-rusko-obse-donbas-pz4-/zahranicni.aspx?c=A150212_151911_zahranicni_vez)

U.S. Air Force will deploy twelve iconic A-10 Thunderbolt II combat aircrafts in Europe, as a part of its preventive defensive strategy towards Russia. Media informed about it on 12<sup>th</sup> February. By the end of February the jets will start operating from an airbase in Spandahlen, Germany. Later, they should be moved to airbases of some Eastern European NATO members.

[http://zpravy.idnes.cz/usa-posilaji-do-evropy-bitevni-letouny-a-10-fi7-/zpr\\_nato.aspx?c=A150212\\_103027\\_zpr\\_nato\\_inc](http://zpravy.idnes.cz/usa-posilaji-do-evropy-bitevni-letouny-a-10-fi7-/zpr_nato.aspx?c=A150212_103027_zpr_nato_inc)

The US Senate approved Ash Carter to become country's defense secretary on 12<sup>th</sup> February. Carter's confirmation process was overwhelmingly supported by both Democrats and Republicans, which is in a stark contrast to his predecessor Chuck Hagel. Carter inherits a military recovering from more than a decade of continuous war and ongoing effects of defense budget cuts.

<http://www.defensenews.com/story/breaking-news/2015/02/12/ash-carter-confirmed-senate-defense-secretary/23294039/>

A gunman attacked café in Copenhagen during a debate about freedom of speech on 14<sup>th</sup> February. One man was shot dead and three policemen were injured during the attack. Later that day, the assailant killed another civilian and injured two more policemen near a synagogue in the city center. The attacker was shot dead by the police early in the morning on 15<sup>th</sup> February.

[http://zpravy.idnes.cz/na-debate-o-svobode-slova-v-kodani-se-strilelo-fao-zahranicni.aspx?c=A150214\\_171839\\_zahranicni\\_ert](http://zpravy.idnes.cz/na-debate-o-svobode-slova-v-kodani-se-strilelo-fao-zahranicni.aspx?c=A150214_171839_zahranicni_ert)

Egyptian jets bombed Islamic State targets in Libya on 16<sup>th</sup> February, after IS had released a video footage showing beheading of 21 Egyptian Copts. Libyan Air Force also joined the attack. According to Libyan Air Force Command between 40 and 50 Islamists were killed in the air raid.

<https://echo24.cz/a/wch7g/egypt-pomstil-vrazdu-21-koptu-zabil-az-padesat-islamistu>

Finland refused Russia's offer to cooperate in the field of military and security. Finnish Minister of Defense Carl Haglund explained that the current situation in Ukraine proved Russia is an unreliable partner in those fields. Therefore Finland is not planning to join Moscow's plan to create security pact in the area of Baltic Sea. The country excluded Russian companies as partners for contract of acquisition of military vessels as well as it refused Russia's offer of shipment of air-fighters, ships, and air defense systems. Media released the information on 18<sup>th</sup> February.

[http://www.natoaktual.cz/finsko-odmita-namluvy-s-ruskem-dme-na\\_zpravy.aspx?c=A150218\\_123347\\_na\\_zpravy\\_m00](http://www.natoaktual.cz/finsko-odmita-namluvy-s-ruskem-dme-na_zpravy.aspx?c=A150218_123347_na_zpravy_m00)

The Czech Ministry of Defense has purchased 19 mortars compatible with NATO standards from Spanish company Expal for 64 million CZK. The public procurement was arranged by NATO NSPA agency. The same agency will arrange another public procurement of 2500 deception targets for CASA aircrafts and MI-171 helicopters as well as 80 bombs for L-159 fighters and Gripen and 720 unguided missiles for MI-24 helicopters. Media released the information on 21<sup>st</sup> February.

<http://domaci.eurozpravy.cz/armada-a-policie/113821-cesko-zbroji-armada-koupila-minometry-maji-nasledovat-pumy-a-rakety/>

Representatives of the Czech Ministry of Defense and Airbus Defense and Space Company have signed a new general agreement on providing service to CASA military transport aircraft. The producer will provide service and maintenance of the four planes for 8 years for the price of 667 million CZK. The agreement was signed on 24<sup>th</sup> February.

[http://www.natoaktual.cz/servis-letounu-casa-zajisti-airbus-d60-na\\_zpravy.aspx?c=A150225\\_115817\\_na\\_zpravy\\_m00](http://www.natoaktual.cz/servis-letounu-casa-zajisti-airbus-d60-na_zpravy.aspx?c=A150225_115817_na_zpravy_m00)

British Prime Minister David Cameron said on 24<sup>th</sup> February that Britain would send military personnel to train the Ukrainian army. British service men will provide advice and assistance, especially in tactical intelligence, logistics and medical care.

<http://uk.reuters.com/article/2015/02/24/uk-ukraine-crisis-britain-idUKKBN0LS1X320150224>

On 24<sup>th</sup> February US President Barack Obama vetoed a bill that would have approved construction of the oil pipeline connecting Canada and USA. The pipeline should have carried tar sands oil from Alberta, Canada, to the US state of Nebraska. The Republicans argued it would create much needed jobs, but many Democrats warned the pipeline would represent an environmental threat. The Keystone bill is Mr. Obama's third presidential veto.

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-31596580>

The Baltic States remain concerned about Russia's aggressive policy. As a result, Lithuania has decided to restore the compulsory military service. The proposal is currently waiting for Parliamentary approval. Lithuanians are also planning acquisitions of military equipment. On 24<sup>th</sup> February, the Welt am Sonntag magazine informed that Germany reportedly refused to sell several dozens of armored vehicles to Lithuania. Shortly after the release, representatives of both countries claimed there had probably been some procedural misunderstanding and assured their ties remained strong.

<http://zahranicni.ihned.cz/c1-63584370-litevci-obnovuji-kvuli-hrozbe-ruske-agrese-povinnou-vojenskou-sluzbu>

Cyprus and Russia have reached agreement on cooperation in the field of military, fight against terrorism and drug trafficking. As a result, Russian military vessels are allowed to anchor on Cypriot shores and aircrafts are authorized to use Cypriot airports for 'humanitarian operations'. AP agency informed that Russia strived to reach similar agreements in many areas of the world in order to expand its global military reach. Media released the information on 25<sup>th</sup> February.

[http://zpravy.idnes.cz/rusko-kypr-dohoda-valecne-lode-letouny-dyh-/zahranicni.aspx?c=A150225\\_192149\\_zahranicni\\_aba](http://zpravy.idnes.cz/rusko-kypr-dohoda-valecne-lode-letouny-dyh-/zahranicni.aspx?c=A150225_192149_zahranicni_aba)