

Blaž Torkar

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REVIEW

ON CZECHOSLOVAK AND CZECH DEFENCE STRATEGY

Stanislav Polnar, Vývoj a proměny československého strategického myšlení. Brno: Univerzita obrany, 2023. ISBN 978-80-7582-293-2.

Knjiga češkega podpolkovnika dr. Stanislava Polnarja z naslovom Vývoj a proměny The book by Czech Lieutenant Colonel Dr Stanislav Polnar, Vývoj a proměny československého strategického myšlení (Development and Transformation of Czechoslovak Strategic Thinking), published in 2023 by the Defence University of Brno, focuses on Czechoslovak strategic thinking, closely tied to the existence of the Czechoslovak state from 1918 to 1992. The question of Czechoslovakia's defence has always been linked to its diplomatic, political, legal and social history. Polnar views strategic thinking as the search for necessary solutions to select the optimal form of the defence for Czechoslovakia, from the country's founding after the First World War to the present-day Czech Republic. This process involved a wide range of tools, including diplomacy, selection of specific military systems, war planning, legislation and the support of the national economy for the military sector . Military science played an indispensable role in this process consistently influencing the preparation of armed forces for future conflict. These factors formed a relatively diverse set of tools for shaping military and defence measures.

Polnar's monograph is interdisciplinary, combining military theory, military history and classical historiography. It highlights the geopolitical position and geographic scope of the Czechoslovak state, situated in Central Europe, where superpower interests converged and still converge. Due to its location, shape and limited economic and demographic potential, Czechoslovakia was never in a position to pursue an expansive or even aggressive foreign policy. Polnar notes that Germany was historically the main security threat to Czechoslovakia and that this threat was often deliberately inflated for political and propaganda purposes, partly due to

foreign influences from France Britain and the Soviet Union, which partly shaped or completely replaced domestic strategic considerations.

The Cold War and the existence of the nuclear threat marked an important milestone in Czechoslovak strategic thinking. From the 1950s onwards, Czechoslovak military doctrine and strategy were forced to align with Soviet concepts of total nuclear war, which Moscow saw as a means of resolving the political contradictions between capitalist and communist countries. The remarkable achievements of Czechoslovak military science, culminating in the Prague Spring of 1968, stemmed precisely from the need to find effective alternatives to this form of warfare. Polnar particularly highlights Memorandum 68, in which some members of the Czechoslovak military intelligentsia sought new versions of Czechoslovak security policy that would ensure that the country does not disappear from the map of Europe in the face of imminent nuclear annihilation.

Finally, Polnar notes that in the 1990s the Czech Republic began to look to the North Atlantic Alliance as the only long-term functional guarantee of Czech national security. The Czech Republic's entry into NATO on 12 March 1999 can therefore be seen as a pragmatic and politically realistic step to secure the country's defence, though not as a fully stable and unchangeable solution. Moreover, the existence of only one dominant military-political bloc in Europe has created a certain imbalance in relations among European countries. Since the turn of the millennium, there has been a slow transfer of political, military and economic power from the Euro-Atlantic to the Asian area, and a gradual transition toward a multipolar organization of the European and global security system. The essence of Czechoslovak and Czech strategic thinking can be seen in the pursuit of a form of neutrality, while respecting international obligations and regional security anchorage.

e-mail: blaz.torkar@guest.um.si

ORCID: 0009-0007-1166-8283

Dr. Blaž Torkar je docent in predavatelj sodobne evropske zgodovine na Oddelku za zgodovino Filozofske fakultete Univerze v Mariboru in vojaške zgodovine na Katedri za obramboslovje Fakultete za družbene vede Univerze v Ljubljani. Je direktor Urada Vlade Republike Slovenije za varovanje tajnih podatkov. Njegove raziskovalne teme so zgodovina obveščevalnih služb, jugoslovanska odporniška gibanja, zavezniki in Jugoslavija med drugo svetovno vojno, Jugoslovanska ljudska armada in teritorialna obramba in slovenska osamosvojitvena vojna leta 1991.

Blaž Torkar, PhD, is an assistant professor, and lectures contemporary European History on the Department of History, Faculty of Arts, University of Maribor and military history on the Department of Defence Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana. He is a director of the Slovenian Government Office for the Protection of Classified Information. His research areas include the history of intelligence services, Yugoslav resistance movements, the Allies and Yugoslavia during the Second World War, the Yugoslav People's Army and Territorial Defense, and the Slovenian War of Independence in 1991.

e-mail: blaz.torkar@guest.um.si

ORCID: 0009-0007-1166-8283

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