

Spatial distribution of military bases and power of interest groups in an emergent democracy

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Abstract

Policies in liberal democracies can never be fully sheltered from the influence of interest groups. This is especially true for the flawed or immature democracies that can be found also in the post-communist world. In this study, we argue that the progress of democratization in Czechia has been accompanied by a growing influence of interest groups (local/regional governments, political parties, industrial corporations) on national defence strategy. Focusing on the spatial policy of military base distribution, the study documents deviations from a rational strategy of restructuring and relocations of military bases declared by the General Staff in the 1990s, 2000s, and 2010s in response to a changing geopolitical situation. The content analysis of the interviews with former actors of the defence planning and media analysis showed that one-third of current Czech military bases experienced an influence of interested groups.

Highlights for public administration, management and planning:

- Quality of life in cities and regions is an important localisation factor for military bases. Positive local social and economic effects of military bases can be stimulated by the improvements in amenities and accessibility.
- Retail prices and prospects of future reuse of former military bases affect significantly the probability of a military base closure and the influence of interest groups.

Keywords

Czechia,
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1 Introduction

Since the end of the Cold War, some Central European countries have experienced a rapid process of demilitarization (Sharp 1993; Smith 1994; Kiss 1993, 2000). Military downsizing in Central Europe was governed by the Treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE)¹. Reunited Germany had to stick to the ceilings given to the Federal Republic of Germany (Herspring 1999). Besides, German Democratic Republic experienced radical demilitarization and military restructuring (Schönherr et al. 1993) in the first half of the 1990s. The main reason was an incompatibility of hardware between Bundeswehr and 'Nationale Volksarmee' that had been trained for the Soviet military doctrine. Poland, on the other hand, decided not to downsize its military forces (Michta 1999). Therefore, the pro-

cess of demilitarization affected mainly regions in which Soviet troops had been located. Czechia opted for a radical demilitarization, restructuring and relocation of the military forces driven by economic rationality. This country exhibited probably the most dramatic relative reduction of the defence sector; the downsizing of the army and consolidation of the armament industries that were associated with (re)democratization and transformation from a centrally-planned to a market economy. The restructuring of armed forces resulted in significant changes in the spatial distribution of military bases (MBs) in Czechia (Ženka et al. 2021). During the last three decades, liberal democracies have also undergone demilitarization (Roland 2021, 94-97). Several authors documented the effects of interest groups on the geographical distribution of MBs in the USA (see Twight 1989; Lindsay 1991; Beaulier et al. 2011) and western European coun-

tries. Defence policy in a democratic state cannot be fully sheltered from the phenomena such as local parochialism and rent-seeking of political representatives. Besides, the military in liberal democracies is often seen as a vehicle of regional policies (Atkinson 1993; Wheeler 2016), pushing non-military interests to the forefront.

Considering the links between politics and MBs in mature democracies, we may expect that the spatial redistribution of MBs in post-communist countries undergoing a transition towards democracy might have been affected by the power of interest groups even more. While Merkel (2004, p. 51) did not label Czechia and other Central European countries as defective (flawed) democracies (in contrast with Ramet et al. 2022), it is clear that persistently high levels of corruption might have negatively affected the rationality of the MBs (re)location. Rapid demilitarization and high corruption were the most important reasons for selecting Czechia as a case of MBs reallocation affected by the power of interest groups.

According to Boehm's theory of regulatory capture (Boehm 2007), the Czech defence policy may have been easily manipulated by a deliberate personal policy keeping personnel in the loop and bound with some particular projects in the defence institution for an adequate time needed for covering venal operations. As witnessed by Buriánek (2014, 2016, 2020), Czechia has been experiencing organized and systemic administrative/corruption (Caiden & Caiden 1977) and with regards to a profusion of MOD's documents shaping the defence policy (Dvorak & Pernica 2021), the MOD may have been experiencing regulatory capture (Boehm 2007). In addition, the Czech defence policy suffers from a superabundance of policy documents², resulting in a frequent reprogramming of the defence programme (Dvorak & Pernica 2021). Thus, this situation may have provided many opportunities for a play of interest groups. Therefore, the aim of this study is an assessment of the influence of interest groups on the localization of MBs in Czechia during the last three decades.

We pay closer attention to the MBs closures and development since the end of the Cold War. The defence sector always suffers from a ubiquitous culture of secrecy (McCartney & McCartney 2015, pp. 82-84) that may boost the power of interest groups. This might be problematic especially in countries scoring low on the Government Defence Anti-Corruption Index (TI 2016), like Czechia. Therefore, our research question is how intensively and through which mechanisms the interest groups intervened in the policy of MBs localization

in the period 1993-2018. As suggested in the following sections, resulting spatial patterns shaped by the play of interest groups deviate substantially from a localization purely driven by military strategic goals or economic rationality.

2 Theoretical departures

Our conceptualization of the interest groups departs from the behavioural approach see Baroni et al. 2014, p. 142, defining the interest groups based on their observable policy-related activities, mostly those activities that influence policy outcomes. For this empirical study, an interest group is defined as any group of organizations 'actively trying to influence the distribution of political goods' (Berry 1977, p. 10) or 'the formulation and implementation of public policy (Grant 1989, p. 9) – see Baroni et al. (2014) for comprehensive summary, definitions and conceptualization.

According to (? , p. 3), small (interest) groups might be surprisingly effective in defence of their interest against the majority. In other words, the few may defeat the many. The few face smaller organizational costs and are less prone to the free-riding problem than the interests of a majority, which might be unorganized or less organized (see also McFarland 1987, p. 131). Therefore, a reform changing a system of concentrated benefits and dispersed costs is not likely to succeed due to the resistance of beneficiaries (see also Beaulier et al. 2011). MB closure and realignment is exactly that kind of reform that aims to reduce dispersed costs at the expense of individual benefits: local military employment, purchasing power, infrastructure and local or regional multiplication effects.

The spatial distribution of MBs can be affected by the interest groups in two ways. Interest groups can affect military presence in a region through an adjustment of the national-level military policies, including the overall level of military budgets and contracts. This option is captured by the Military-Industrial Complex Theory (Cobb 1969, 1976; Lindsay 1991; Roland 2021), testing the assumption that political representatives of the regions economically dependent on an MB support national-level defence spending to prevent the MBs' closure in their electoral district (Frawley 2006; Ženka et al. 2021).

The other option is bargaining with the military at the local, regional or national level of civil-military relations. If we turn to this kind of action, Kehl (2003) provides a comprehensive list of exist-

ing political mechanisms aimed at the utilization of the MBs by interest groups:

- principal-agent problems,
- bureaus,
- rent-seeking/special interests,
- logrolling.

Considering the principal-agent problems and bureaus, an agent is a person/organization employed to perform a task for the principal (Kehl 2003, p. 22). The principal-agent problem (e.g. between the employer and his employee, landlord and his tenant) arises when the agent's actions are neither directly observable nor can be inferred from observable variables (Stiglitz 1989), providing the agent with an opportunity to act against the principal's interests. The Ministry of Defence (MOD) and the Parliament are agents of the citizens of Czechia. The MOD and the General Staff of the Czech Armed Forces (CAF) are agents and also bureaus to the Parliament. Principals and agents may have different or even competing interests, the same holds also for the Parliament and bureaus. Asymmetric information, imperfect monitoring and delegation of some power over policy implementation, especially in cases of unpopular or controversial decisions (Whicker & Giannattasio 1997), to the bureaus, might provide an opportunity for the protection and maintenance of unsuitable military bases. On the other hand, and perhaps more importantly, rent-seeking of the legislators might lead (Kehl 2003, p. 30) to a situation when

"...Unwanted weapon systems and base infrastructure are legislated and funded for legislators to obtain campaign contributions and ensure sufficient approval rating for successful re-election bids. The result is that a few dollars are spent by special interests in return for huge contract awards and the retention of unneeded military infrastructure."

Last but not least, logrolling (trading of votes among the elected representatives) might preserve costly, obsolete or unsuitable military bases in exchange for the political support of other infrastructural projects, laws or policies.

As already suggested, the spatial distribution of MBs and an assignment of a specific kind of service to the MBs might reflect not only the needs of the military strategy but also the local parochialism of legislators (Twight 1989; Lindsay 1991). In particular, MBs in highly urbanized areas are often objects of such a policy because interest groups can benefit from the left military assets by their conversion into private development projects (Atkinson 1993).

3 Spatial distribution of military bases in Czechia in the transition period

From the viewpoint of the military, the transition period can be divided into three phases framed by significant milestones in the development of Civil-Military Relations (CMR) and also by different legislative periods:

- 1990–1995: rapid downsizing of military equipment with an offensive potential (battle tanks, armoured personnel carriers, artillery systems, battle helicopters, battle aircraft) to meet the ceilings of the CFE Treaty. These demilitarization activities took place already before the dissolution of Czechoslovakia in 1992.
- 1996–2005: a period of gradual professionalisation and force modernization reflecting the goal to become a NATO nation. Military downsizing and closing of the MBs continued. However, the decisions on the allocation of troops in the national territory were supposed to be a product of standard CMR in a democratic country.
- Since 2005 (the All-Volunteer Force), a period of force modernization where an allocation of troops is a result of democratic CMR. Military expertise may be opposed by political actors. The decision-making in the defence institution might have been affected by the power of interest groups.

Due to the fact, that there had been no regional governments until 2000, the CMR in the first phase were based on a direct relationship between the defence institution and local governments. The MOD's decision-making might have been affected by the power of ruling political parties in the first (1992–1996), second (1996–1998) and third (1998–2002) legislative periods. In addition, the development of CMR in the 1990s was affected by economic slow-down and uncertainty of a NATO enlargement.

The second and third transitional phases, framed by the fourth (2002–2006), fifth (2006–2010), and sixth (2010–2013) legislative periods, were characterized by a retirement of obsolete (often Soviet) military capacities not meeting the NATO standards (that has started already in the first phase). Since the establishment of 14 regional governments in 2000, the CMR have become more complex. The regional governments have become significant

actors in regional development policy since the EU enlargement in 2004 and in many cases opposed the central policy of ruling parties. The military real estate in cities was often seen as a potential for commercial projects of both regional and local governments despite the financial austerity caused by the Great Recession (2008–2010). More recently, the seventh (2013–2017) and eighth legislative periods (2017–2021) were characterized by force modernization in response to the Crimea crisis (2014). In addition, the CMR in the whole investigated period suffered by significant deficiencies. They have never met standards of CMR in democratic countries (Purkrábek 1997; Kříž 2010; Frič & Pernica 2022).

Turning to the geographical effects of the above-mentioned CMR, Czechia has experienced not only an unprecedented downsizing of the military but also the spatial concentration of troops to (larger) cities (Hercik 2016; Ženka et al. 2021): compare Fig. 1 and Fig. 3. In general, this “urbanization” or “metropolization” of the military has been a response to the shift towards the All-Volunteer Force (AVF) because well-developed regions may provide better prospects of military recruitment (due to a higher concentration of youth and a demographic boom), residential preferences (better quality of life), and an effect of urbanization economies (the better prospect of reintegration of retired military personnel in their civic lives). In addition, local prospects of economic development were important, as the Czech Armed Forces (CAF) transferred ownership of barracks in historical cores of cities to local authorities, marked these areas as brownfields and re-utilised them for commercial development. Regional socio-economic disparities (see Zdražil and Applová 2016 for the empirics), on the other hand, played almost no role in the MOD decision-making (Ženka et al. 2021), nor the cohesion policy (Dyba et al. 2018), or accessibility of human capital in regions (Mallick & Zdražil 2018) did. In the first transitional phase, the aim of the troop redistribution was “well-proportioned installation of troops for a case of an attack from any case... and a reduction of air force respecting issues of civil-military relations and ecology” (MOD 1995). In the second phase, Czech strategists strived for stabilization of the military in municipalities that are close to military training areas (MTA) and provide good prospects of quality of life to cover the demand for professional military personnel needed for purposes of the out-of-area operations and save money for their training. The spatial policy of the military distribution until the shift to the AVF

had been determined by a tendency to hold a large military (Pernica 2020).

On the other hand, the size and structure of the CAF in the 1990s were usually determined by a lack of defence spending⁴. In the 1990s, the MOD coped with this situation by reducing the air force. The retirement of military aircraft was followed by the closing down of military airfields/air bases⁵. Besides, the MOD strived for the reintegration of civil defence capabilities installed in the regions where they were supposed to operate into the Ministry of Interior. Ground forces were redeployed to MTAs (Libavá, Hradiště, Boletice, Brdy) if it was possible. As stated by F. Hrabal, supreme commander of the ground forces, “Our intention is to organize units, for instance, mechanized infantry brigades, into installations which are not only in the vicinity of the military training areas but they must be close each to other” (Šverdlík & Pirník 2000). Despite this effort, the MTAs’ plans of collective training remained too large for a shrinking military (MOD 2002):

“The armed forces are installed in 133 municipalities having a status of the MB. Besides, there are other 33 municipalities with military facilities. This situation is partly a result of the military strategy, and partly it is a result of a compromise with politics. The number of municipalities with a military presence is determined by unrealistic defence planning. This situation causes high costs, an infrastructure deficit exceeding CZK 25 bn... A priority is the closure of MBs. The military ought to be installed only in key municipalities and in a few ground forces and air force military bases, preferably close to MTAs as much as possible. ...Also, troops should be close to these areas and modern training facilities... In response to the shift to the AVF, new construction and infrastructure modernization are needed.”

In the third phase, the MOD operated 26 MBs concentrated in 18 municipalities (MOD 2015). Since 2002, the list of the MBs was determined (and often rethought) by the strategic documents issued by MOD in 2002, 2003, 2007, 2011, and 2019. The shift to the AVF was linked to massive infrastructure investment. In addition, the military downsizing eliminated inherited infrastructural deficits. Considering the division of Czechia into two historical regions, western (Bohemia) and eastern (Moravia), the spatial distribution of core military capabilities (MOD 2015–2019) followed this dualism. For example, each of the two mechanized infantry brigades has been installed in the vicinity of the two largest MTAs (Hradiště in Bohemia, Libavá in Moravia) by 2005. Military units providing

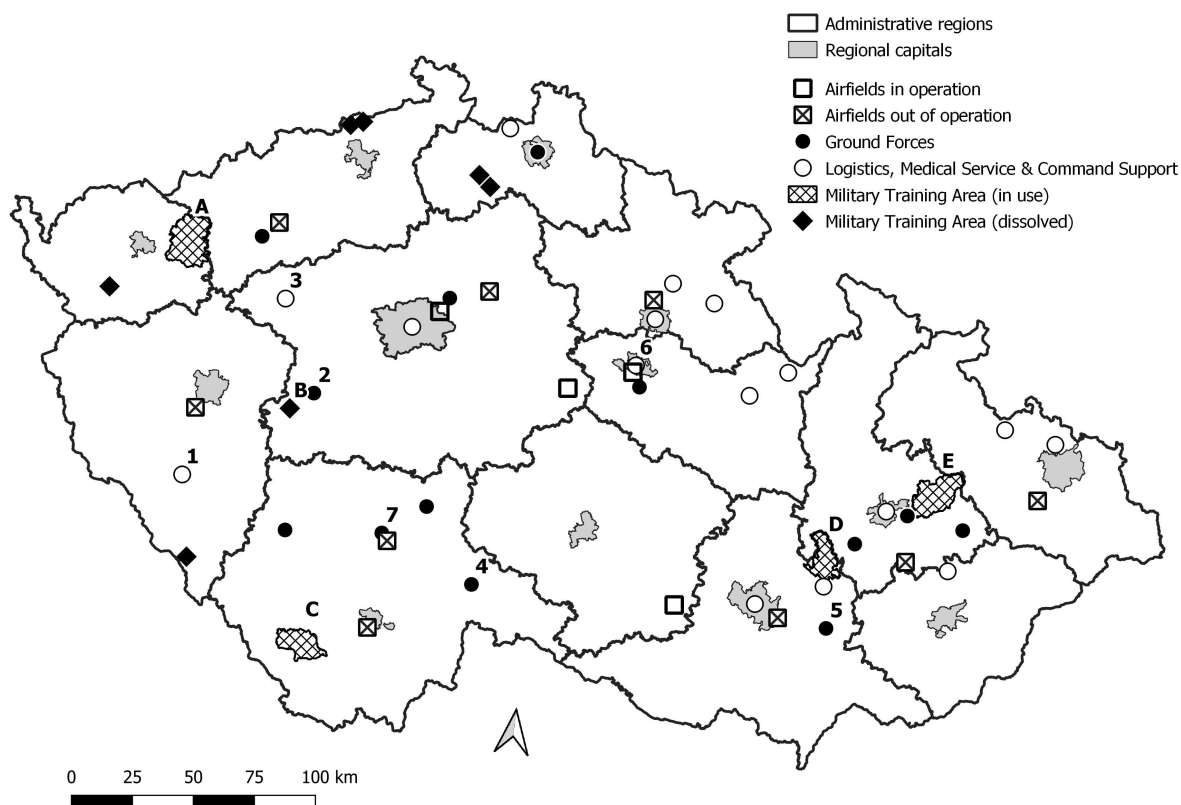


Fig. 1 Spatial distribution of MBs in Czechia (2022); Notes: A: MTA Hradiště; B: MTA Brdy (dissolved in 2015); C: MTA Boletice; D: MTA Březina; E: MTA Libavá; 1: Klatovy; 2: Jince; 3: Rakovník; 4: Jindřichův Hradec; 5: Bučovice; 6: Pardubice; 7: Bechyně. Sources: [Ženka et al. 2021](#)

logistics and support of the central command were rather installed in the central part of Czechia (see [Fig. 1](#)).

Nevertheless, (re)location of several MBs lacked the rationality declared by the MOD (see [Ženka et al. 2021](#)) and might have been affected by the power of interest groups. A question is if, how and to what extent has this influence been introduced in the MOD policy and how intensively the interest groups intervened in the policy of troop localization since the establishment of Czechia in 1993.

4 Methodology

In this paper, we draw on a content analysis of various sources of information: media, parliamentary interpellations and, most importantly, interviews with military insiders (inspired by [Shamiev 2021](#)). To document the effects of interest groups, we tried to identify, describe and explain cases of MBs closures that deviated significantly from the logic of purely military interests. The first step

was the construction of the database covering MBs closures and establishments since 1994 ([Fig. 2](#)), based on the MOD's military statistic databases ([MOD 1995, 2002, 2003, 2015](#)) and [Ženka et al. \(2021\)](#). We did not consider changes in the period 1990–1993 due to the dissolution of Czechoslovakia and the withdrawal of Soviet troops.

Next, all MBs' closures since 1994 were evaluated from the viewpoint of the military logic, considering the geostrategic factors, restructuring of the Army, demographic, socioeconomic and other factors at the local, regional and national levels (see [Beaulier et al. 2011; Ženka et al. 2021](#) for the list of factors). A preliminary list of MBs changes that deviated significantly from the military logic was constructed. The examples include hardly explainable closures of

- i. MBs in strategic locations from the viewpoint of the Army,
- ii. newer MBs with relatively modern equipment or
- iii. MBs in large cities, which closures might have allowed the interest groups to capitalize on their conversion and commercial redevelopment (see

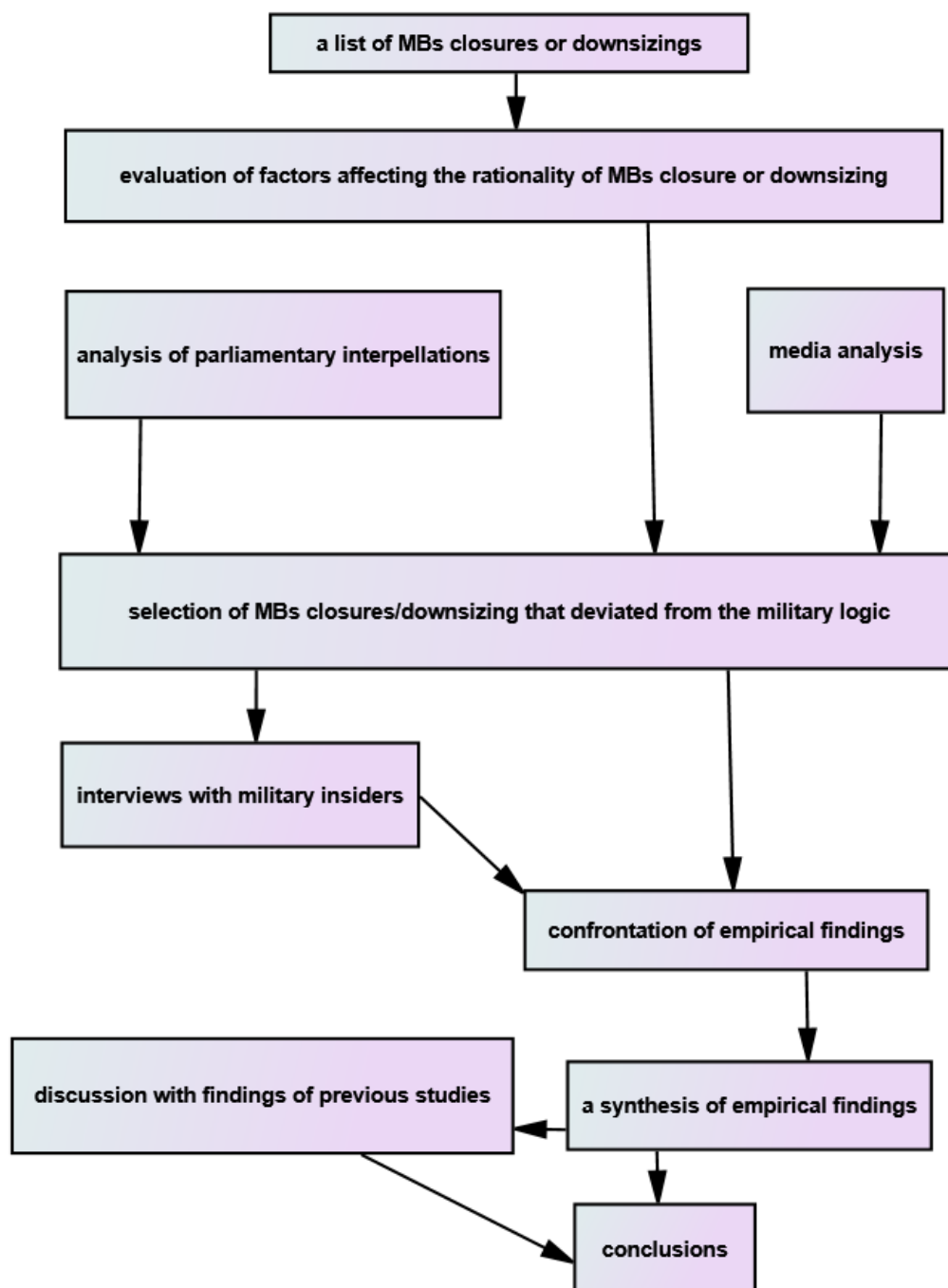


Fig. 2 Methodology of the paper: a flowchart

Ženka et al. 2021). These cases were confronted with media analysis and an assessment of parliamentary interpellations. The final list of MBs closures hardly explainable by purely military interests was prepared and confronted with the results of interviews, which suggested any potential influence of the interest groups and its type: principal-agent, bureaus, rent-seeking and special interests.

Media analysis was based primarily on media digest collected by the MOD, Press and Communication division, providing content selected from TVs, radios, newspapers and the internet for the period 2000–2021. The period 1990–1999 was covered by archives of two dailies (MFDnes, Právo), printed media characterised by a high circulation and focusing on a broad portfolio of topics. We also utilised A-report, a magazine issued by the MOD since 1993 to inform the military and civil personnel employed in the defence institution on the MOD policies and politics. This magazine provided us with information about the policy of MBs establishments, relocations and closures from the viewpoint of the defence institution that was not so critical as public media. We were also interested in articles focusing on infrastructure modernization which had been often criticized by the Czech Republic Supreme Audit Office as wasting taxpayers' money (e.g. NKÚ 2022).

The spatial distribution of military forces in Czechia was rather a peripheral topic in the media: both in national and regional versions of the newspapers. Analysing the investigated period, we found up to 100 relevant articles either lobbying for a military presence in the municipality/region or criticising the government for wasting taxpayers' money by closing the recently modernised MBs. Agents preventing the MBs' closures or criticizing the military spending were mostly local and regional political representatives, mayors and governors ('hejtman'). Surprisingly, civic sector members such as clubs of military history/military fortification were rather embracing the policy of MBs' closing. Besides, we also analysed interpellations in the Parliament on the issues of the defence policy: questions of deputies to members of the government stated in the period 1996–2021. These interpellations were available as open data (Parliament 2022). Database before 1996 was fragmentary with regards to a state of digitalization of the sources of the Parliament library. This analysis helped us to identify controversial cases of MBs closures and revealed that the issues of defence occupied rather marginal space in the political discourse, accounting on average for 1.6% of all parliamentary interpellations annually.

Being aware of the fact, that people are usually not willing to speak openly in public about their involvement in activities such as lobbying, clientelism, nepotism, patronage or corruption, we interviewed retired personnel of the MOD who were involved in shaping defence strategy, policy and defence planning mostly in the period 1990–2018 (Table 1). The respondents were asked to answer 10 open questions on CMR at the subnational level of government. Considering some personal experience with defence planning at the MOD⁶, we asked if they have ever witnessed any influence of interest groups. In the next section, we draw on the answers of twelve respondents, who were mostly interviewed between the 29th of October and the 25th of November. To complement several missing pieces of information, we also conducted two interviews on December 2022. Respondents were asked to describe their experience with the military restructuring and MBs relocation only in that period when they were active in their functions (two respondents were asked about two periods). Our primary interest was the period 1996–2005 when the most profound spatial reallocation of MBs occurred (Ženka et al. 2021).

Table 1 A sample of respondents (numbers in three selected periods)

	period 1 1990–1995	period 2 1996–2004	period 3 2005–2018
Defence minister	1	1	0
Deputy minister	0	1	0
Chief/commander of the General Staff	0	2	1
Member of the Military Intelligence Service	0	1	0
Ministerial officer/official	1	2	2
Military officer	0	1	0
TOTAL	2	7	3

Note: The numbers refer to the periods, for which the interviews held a position.

All data gathered from interviews, media and parliamentary interpellations were analysed and interpreted by conventional qualitative content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon 2005). No preconceived theory-driven categories were employed. Rather, an inductive category development (Mayring 2000) was used, letting the categories emerge from the data flow after reading all texts to get a sense of the whole (Hsieh & Shannon 2005).

Special interests were defined as the interests articulated either by legislators or small oligopoly industries (Olson 1971, pp. 44, 127–128) that were

not linked directly to financial profit. Rent-seeking refers to the lobbying that ‘diverts resources away from positive-sum activities into zero and even negative-sum efforts to capture transfers, resulting in social costs (Tollison 2012; original concept: Tullock 1967). Any log-rolling has not been identified.

5 Results of the media analysis

Drawing on the data collected by Ženka et al. (2021) and the content analysis of media, we argue the influence of interest groups on the MBs’ relocation both at the national and local level was observable already in the 1990s (see the Appendix). For example, district towns Bruntál and Šumperk where the Soviet MBs were located until 1991, requested a new military presence in 1994. Such requests of the local governments were sometimes supported by heads of the district offices, and civil servants appointed by the government, as in Žďár nad Sázavou *“We regret there is no military base in the city. I see no point when municipalities are against any military presence. If there is a base in the municipality, the local government has a capability for coping with disasters”* (MF Dnes 1994). Sometimes, heads of local governments lobbied for the utilization of the military as a vehicle of regional policy. For example, the mayor of Vimperk, a municipality of 7,400 residents close to the border with Germany, stated *“I keep lobbying for the military in my city everywhere – at the General Staff, the MOD and in the Parliament. If the military would leave Vimperk, 80 people will be unemployed.”*

The same position was held by the politicians in Brno and Ostrava, the second and the third-largest city in Czechia (MF Dnes 1999). After 2000, when the government opted to abandon military coercion, an implementation of the AVF lead often to the degradation of the infrastructure investment in municipalities which the MOD decided to leave. This was criticized by the Czech Republic Supreme Office (NKÚ 2022) *“A lack of strategic thinking and an absence of transparent public documents last years caused substantial sunk cost. The MOD invested in a huge amount of taxpayers’ money in municipalities without troops or ready to be closed.”*

In addition, there was a criticism of a lack of holistic regional policy as stated by the mayor of Zbiroh, a municipality with a population of 2,500, in 2000 *“The base closure in Zbiroh was a waste of the taxpayer’s money. The barracks were completed in 1996 and the cost was CZK 450 m. The area is composed of a new dining facility, a gymnasium,*

a petrol station and a sewage water treatment plant. The population of the city is about 2,500 people and a withdrawal of several hundred military personnel would be a disaster for small businesses. The purchasing power in the municipality would drop significantly” (Šverdík & Pirník 2000). However, this issue did not get any larger audience in the Parliament, deviating from the interests of politics at the national level.

In the media, any sunk costs related to infrastructure modernization in the 1990s and the early 2000s were not presented as a product of poor defence planning, but as corruption conducted by the Christian Democrats who were in charge of the defence policy until 1998. The main actor in this period was M. Kalousek, minister deputy for budget and public procurement, a member of the Parliament from 1996–2020, a minister of finance from 2007–2013, a close friend of R. Háva (No 78 in the Forbes Czechia TOP100 wealthy men in 2021), who was an owner of the Omnipol group, the most prominent supplier to the MOD until 2015. Kalousek’s role in defence planning was summarized in the Endowment Fund Against Corruption (NFPK 2014, pp. 32–33, 94–97) as follows:

“In 2003, the Military Intelligent Service was entrusted to scrutinize hundreds of MOD’s infrastructure contracts in the 1990s... According to the report, the MOD lost CZK 3 bn in unnecessary MBs’ reconstruction before their closing down and a free-of-charge transfer of the military assets to the municipal governments.... Several groups of officers and white-collars secured by the power of central politics sought bribes at the MOD and regional infrastructure offices for many years.”

However, expenditures on military construction were not the only case considered as a vehicle of stabilization policies. The robust defence industry base was a communist legacy (Pernica 2020) but its potential became idle after the mass demilitarization in the 1990s (Ženka et al. 2021). Social democrats in power between 1998–2006 planned to use the positive economic effects of military modernization to stabilise some economically lagging regions. In this regard, M. Urban, a member of the Parliament for social democracy in 1998–2004 and 2006–2013, and minister of industry and trade in 2003–2006 interpellated a new right-wing government in the issue of procurement of Tatra lorries⁷ produced in Kopřivnice, a small Moravian town where the capacity of the plant was 15,000 lorries per a year in the 1980s. An original plan of the social democrats was to spend CZK 2.183 bn on the procurement of 556 all-terrain military vehicles (with an option to procure up to 977 vehicles).

By allowing the alternation of original technical parameters, the right-wing government decided to increase the share of imports from CZK 469 to 543 m in this project. By 2009, the MOD procured 593 vehicles (Parliament 2007). The defence minister L. Kostelka (2003–2004), a retired general from the office of the 1st deputy of Chief of the General Staff, piloted a procurement of these vehicles without any tender because *“We at the MOD did not want to get this product from someone abroad.”* The delivery of the Tatra-trucks was linked with a special provision (1.3% of the delivery price per vehicle procured by the MOD) for P. Stošek, a Kostelka’s classmate at the Military Academy in Brno (ČTK 2008).

Another interesting case of the intervention of interest groups, while not directly related to the spatial distribution of MBs, was the procurement of PANDURS II 8 x 8, armoured personnel carriers (APC). In response to the Yugoslavia mission during the mid-1990s, the CAF demanded new wheeled APC. Convoys of these vehicles move easily across the state territory without risk of damage to motorways. Required technical reliability could not be guaranteed by the OT-64 SKOT transporters delivered in the 1970s. In addition, sourcing mechanised battalions with new APCs might reduce the need to allocate the MBs close to the MTAs (up to 50 km). Although procurement of these vehicles was planned by 1997, the new carriers substituting the retired OT-64 SKOT transporter were delivered only in 2011 and the procurement was affected by corruption (Pernica 2018, 2020). The MOD requested to procure the new APCs for a mechanised brigade, but the right-wing government reduced the procurement plan in 2007. Instead of 199 vehicles, the MOD requested only 107. The MOD bought Pandur II 8x8 APCs but light infantry units (air-borne infantry) not linked with a particular MTA were equipped with armoured cars that were easy to move across Czechia.

In the 2000s and 2010s, a vehicle of the military stabilization policy was expected offsets that ought to stabilise the MOD’s state-owned companies in the small cities of Vyškov, Šternberk, and Nový Jičín. However, after a delivery of 107 (CZK 14.4 bn) PANDURS II 8x8 wheeled armoured personnel carriers in 2011, the company in Šternberk participating in the offset programme was ordered by the White Paper on Defence (MOD 2011) to close down. Their assets, including a maintenance line for PANDURS, were sold to M. Strnad, a Tatra group owner and No 25 in the Forbes Czechia TOP100 wealthy men in 2021. Twenty other PANDURS were delivered after 2017 by the Tatra Defence Vehicles.

6 Results of the interviews with the insiders

In general, the interviews with the actors of the defence policy and planning during the investigated period emphasized the influence of the CFE on the MBs’ closures. Also, the troop distribution changes in the 1990s were mainly determined by the new geopolitical situation. Besides, several MBs’ closures were due to the retirement of military equipment, in particular, aircraft and anti-aircraft artillery. A summary of interviews with actors behind the defence policy is presented in Table 2. Respondents who dealt with the defence planning daily were more critical of the hidden agenda behind the MBs’ distribution than others. In particular, retired military planners criticised ministers and deputy ministers.

As stated by a retired colonel in the 2000s:

“I think that the regional agenda was a priority and military interests were secondary. For instance, the military airport in Bechyně was decommissioned in the early 1990s due to M. Kalousek, deputy defence minister in 1993–1998, who was a resident in Bechyně. The military airport in Náměšť nad Oslavou was chosen as prospective because J. Tvrdík, defence minister in 2001–2003, ran for a seat in the Parliament in the 2002 election despite that the operational ability of the airfield was significantly affected by an unfavourable climate in the region.”

Sometimes, the troop’s installation was made to reflect the personal preference of ministerial officials as well as political lobbying - as described by a high military officer.

“Even in 2000, the MOD wanted to close down some military bases because of their small value added to collective military training and too disproportional operating cost. Yet the pressure of politics was immense. There was unscrupulous lobbying in Parliament as well as at the MOD.”

He confirmed a superiority of regional economic interests over the defence policy that can be demonstrated by the story of the MB Rakovník, which is relatively close to Praha, but far from any MTA.

“This military base was modernized despite the MOD already declaring it as unnecessary in the 1990s. The base was closed down in response to the White Paper on Defence recommendations by 2015, but it is about to be re-opened again.”

A ministerial official retired in the 2010s emphasized a lack of coherence in politics in the short run. *“While minister J. Tvrdík in charge of the shift to the AVF insisted on quality of life and job op-*

Table 2 The interview assessment: actors' attitudes to an influence of interest groups

	Members of the governments and deputy ministers (3)	Military top officers (3)	Ministerial bureaucrats military officers (6)
A	There was no hidden agenda, only a need to follow geopolitical challenges and a limitation by the MOD budget.	There was no hidden agenda.	Until the shift to the AVF, there was sometimes a hidden agenda – special ministerial “wishes”.
B	A decision to close MB was a multicriterial task.	A decision to close MB was a multicriterial task.	The main reasons for the MB's closures were military modernization and commitments to NATO.
C	There usually was a primacy of the military over politics.	There was always a primacy of the military over politics, in particular, with the air force.	There was sometimes an influence of regional interests.
D	The main motivation was always a demand by the military.	The main factor determining the decision remains the MOD budget.	The main factor in the 1990s was the peace dividend. In the 2010s, the main factor was a need for Host Nation Support.

A: a hidden agenda behind the MOD's defence policy of troop installation.

B: the main reason for an MB closing.

C: a primacy of military expertise over the power of politics (need to use the military as a vehicle of a regional policy).

D: differences in motivation to close/open an MB in the 1990s and 2010s.

Source: Own survey research of the authors (October–November 2018, December 2022)

portunities for military personnel's spouses when assessing the list of MBs, minister K. Kühnl preferred Moravia to Bohemia... The lack of quality of life in Janovice nad Úhlavou was the main reason for closure down of this base even though the MOD invested there heavily in the 1990s."

In addition, the respondents often pointed out cherry-picking in the infrastructure policy in larger towns and cities⁸. Old barracks at the Náměstí Republiky in Praha were rebuilt into a luxury shopping centre in the 1990s (NFPK 2014, pp. 23–26). In 2010, the city of Pardubice (regional capital) managed to push the transfer of artillery to Jince, a small municipality close to the MTA. Also, the 7th mechanized brigade installed in Moravia at the MTA Libavá became too remote for collective training of the artillery.

Finally, to consider deviations of actual MBs' localisation from the military logic of the army undergoing a process of professionalization, it is necessary to explain briefly the necessity of the MBs' location in proximity to the MTAs. The capacity of the MTAs in Czechoslovakia (Pernica & Prudká 2016) reflected the need of training of the Czechoslovak front (Vacek 1994, pp. 79–82, 138–140). Also, the MTAs offered not only training facilities for ground forces, but also the battle air force. The downsizing and reorientation of the military capabilities from offensive to defensive ones resulted in a reduction of the MTAs in the 1990s.

The number of MTAs reflected a new concept of operation: a division composed of three mechanised brigades instead of an army. These brigades were supposed to be installed in the vicinity (up to 50 km) of the three largest MTAs (Hradiště, Brdy, Libavá) that had the capacity for collective training of one mechanised brigade at least (Švarcová 2006). The smallest MTA, Březina, was left for the military training of the cadets from the military academy in Vyškov and Brno. The MTA Boletice was intended for the training of foreign troops. However, austerity in the military budget in 2003 caused a reduction in a number of mechanised brigades from three to two. Hence, there were only two mechanised brigades after the shift to the AVF in 2005. The 4th Rapid Deployable Mechanised Brigade was expected to train in the MTA Hradiště, close to the borderline to Germany. The other brigade, the 4th Mechanised Brigade, installed in Moravia, was expected to train in the MTA Libavá. The central capacity of artillery was left in the vicinity of MTA Brdy.

However, a shift to the AVF has not changed the attitude of the MOD toward the localisation of MBs, as stated by general Hrabal (Šverdík & Pírník 2000). The MOD closed the MBs where military training was provided to conscripts and strived for centralization of logistic capacities. Although the responsibility for civil defence shifted from the MOD to the Ministry of Interior and fire brigades in 2000, regional govern-

ments lobbied for an extra capacity for civil defence. Also, the military operates five engineer battalions in the vicinity of large metropolitan cities and regional capitals (Kutná Hora and Rakovník close to Praha, Jindřichův Hradec relatively close to České Budějovice, Bučovice in proximity to Brno and Hlučín in Ostrava's metropolitan hinterland). Their position reflected the situation of the Cold war and their function as a rescue capacity for the civic population. Also, these MBs were at a remote distance from the MTAs reserved for collective training of mechanised brigades (Table 3).

Table 3 Road distances between the MBs and MTAs (2022)

Military bases	Military training areas			
	Boletice	Březina	Hradiště	Libavá
Bechyně	69	239	206	305
Bučovice	276	30	366	97
Hranice	360	75	450	63
Chrudim	214	164	255	160
Jince	297	150	138	362
Jindřichův Hradec	95	193	265	258
Liberec	285	281	246	277
Olomouc	322	37	412	35
Opava	412	127	502	45
Pardubice	229	162	244	174
Prostějov	52	19	394	55
Práslavice	333	48	424	36
Tábor	98	217	220	283
Žatec	269	337	69	404

Note: Distance lower than 50 km (optimal from the viewpoint of the military logic) are marked blue.

Source: [viamichelin.com](https://www.viamichelin.com)

Finally, the concept of MBs' localisation around the MTAs reflected a governmental request from the beginning of the 1990s not to bother the civilian population with military activities. The MOD expected to continue collective training at such intensity as during the Cold War (Zbytek 2012). However, this has never happened. Also, it has been strongly criticised by retired military elites, such as General M. Vacek 1999, pp. 79–82. Considering the distance from the MB Jindřichův Hradec to the MTA Hradiště (180 km as the crow flies) and the distance from MB Bučovice to MTA Libavá (70 km as the crow flies), the conversion of these MBs from engineer battalions in the end of the 2000s to light infantry battalions was incongruous. Correspondingly, the localisation of the 42nd mechanised battalion in Tábor can be considered similarly irrational, but they were equipped by the wheeled APCs. On the other hand, political representatives of Tábor (but also of Strakonice or Žatec) were not willing to allow

for a total demilitarization of the city where the military had played a substantial role for decades. Local political initiatives aimed at the prevention of MBs closures have been frequent since the closure of the military airport in Bechyně and its negative local socio-economic effects.

7 Discussion

Summarizing the results of the interviews and media analysis, there have been eleven cases where the interest groups directly intervened in the defence policy (Fig. 3). MBs in Jindřichův Hradec and Bučovice are worth closer attention. Firstly, the military base of Jindřichův Hradec was modernized behind the defence minister's back in 2006. A group of 52 actors (11 ministerial officials, 2 notaries, one advocate, and 38 other people representing contractors) was sentenced for it in 2011 (Němeček 2011). Secondly, both municipalities experienced unexpected replacement of MBs. Five engineer battalions (Jindřichův Hradec, Kutná Hora, Rakovník, Bučovice and Hlučín) were dissolved as inappropriate for the contemporary tasks in an out-of-area operation. To gain manpower for the International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF), two battalions were converted into light infantry battalions, although they had been originally planned for national tasks in homeland security (see MOD 2002, 2003).

However, the demand for peacekeeping forces declined in 2009. The main equipment ensuring mobility of these units have become all-terrain Tatra trucks acquired in the period 2006–2009. Although this move might have opened back doors for a reconstruction of the third mechanized brigade, originally installed close to the MTA Brdy and Boletice and dissolved in response to a reduction of military expenditures (MOD 2003), these military units were scattered over the Czech territory without any rational link to any MTA.

The influences of interest groups on the MOD's decision-making were even stronger in the last two decades. In 2010, J. Štefěc 2010 details¹⁰, how the MOD regularly changed its central procurement plan, including a plan of infrastructure modernization, by 90% during each fiscal year in the period 2004–2009. The acquisition plans for 2004 and 2005 were changed by 110%! Hence, any strategy of military investment justified in defence planning did not in fact matter. Also, this influence of interest groups can hardly be considered as a supportive for democracy when corruption becomes institutionalized.

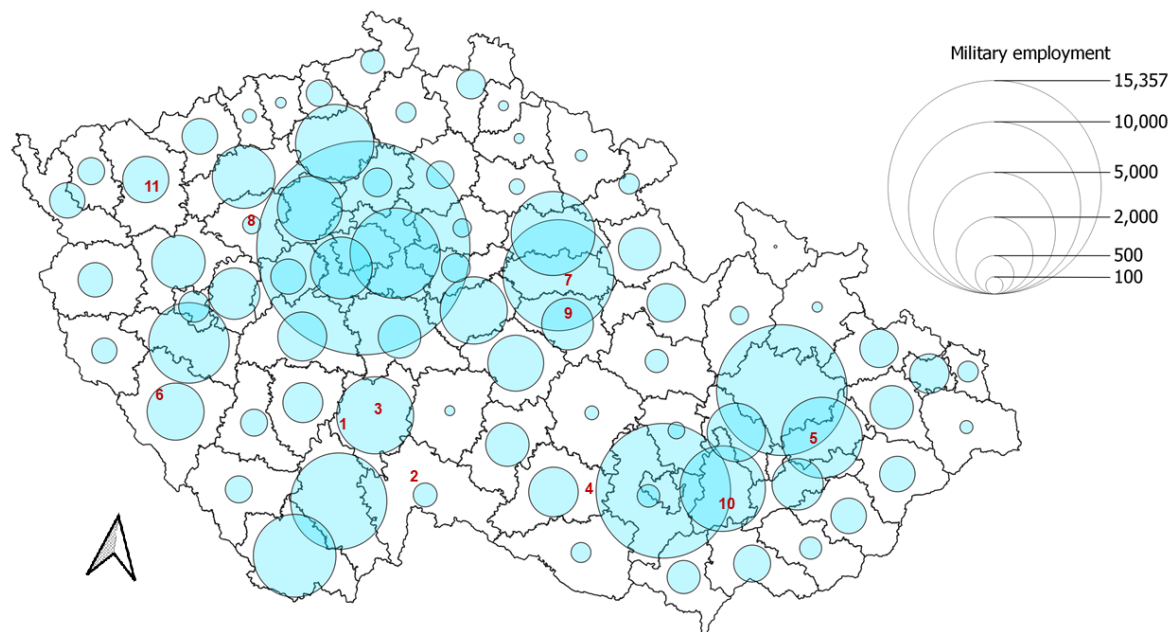


Fig. 3 Spatial distribution of MBs affected by the power of interest groups (1993-2018) confronted with the initial military employment at the district level (1994); Notes: 1=Bechyně; 2=Jindřichův Hradec; 3=Tábor; 4=Náměšť nad Oslavou; 5=Prerov; 6=Klatovy; 7=Pardubice; 8=Rakovník; 9=Chrudim; 10=Bučovice; 11=Hradiště. Source: [Ženka et al. 2021](#); the authors

In the situation, when chaos in defence planning caused by interest groups is an immanent ingredient of the MOD's organizational culture, any tools for improvement of accountability and transparency in the defence institution, such as the Planning Programming Budgeting System were not welcomed despite the fact that accountability and transparency strengthen the power of democracy. However, according to [Young 2016](#):

"In most defence institutions in Central and Eastern Europe, defence plans are seen as a discrete and almost isolated activity from the rest of the management of the armed forces, since they rarely, if ever, address how 'defence' can fit within the existing budget."

Thus, interest groups often receive the same priority in defence planning as the development of military capabilities pledged to NATO when the government considers that 2% of GDP is too much money to spend on poor defence ([Dvorak & Pernica 2021](#)). Also, a regulatory capture in the Czech defence institution could be overcome by a proper application of defence planning. As stated by [Young 2016](#):

"...irrespective of budget methods used, these institutions need to reinforce the authorities of policy directorates so that they become capable of expressing guidance and priorities in financial terms and not just words.... defence planning needs

to be redefined to include more than just drafting plans. This activity needs to be expanded to include the critically important activity of ensuring that programmes are developed in agreement with policy priorities."

The principal problem is thus lacking the will of political leaders to reform the defence planning for a purpose that this term gained in Western NATO countries.

8 Conclusions

The MBs' closures and spatial reallocations in Czechia since the early 1990s should have been motivated primarily by economic rationality, as declared by the MOD. In the 1990s, relocations of MBs were expected to minimize the cost of collective military training. Therefore, the MOD preferred the development of military bases in the vicinity of five MTAs. In the 2000s, the MOD wanted to ensure a high quality of life for military personnel and their families to avoid the fluctuation in the AVF. This was a vital precondition for ensuring collective training. Nevertheless, the efforts of the MOD's spatial policy were in many cases impaired by the power of interest groups. Localisation of MBs was affected

by the rent-seeking/special interests (corruption), principal-agent activities (utilization of national politics to defend the military presence in municipalities) and bureaus (governmental interventions into defence planning). The power of the interest groups was indicated by the interviews with insiders of the defence policy and planning as well as by the content analysis of selected media. More than one-third of 26 current MBs have been in some way impacted by the activities of interest groups.

The Czech defence institutions seem to keep experiencing regulatory capture when criteria for troop distribution have been changed by strategic documents issued in 2002, 2003, 2007, 2011, and 2019. In addition, the military was considered a vehicle of stabilization policy with the upswing of populism after 2013. While the interviews and media analysis indicated the extent and mechanisms of the influence of the interested groups on the MBs' location, it is necessary to consider certain limitations of the research. Firstly, the low response rate resulting from the reluctance to answer sensitive questions reduced the list of our respondents. We were not able to interview the key actors (ex-ministers of defence, generals, colonels, deputies) in all phases of the military transformation and the MBs' reallocation. Secondly, using the terminology of the principal-agent theory, most of our respondents were the principals, while the agents (and also bureaus) were underrepresented. Thirdly, political representatives, MB staff and other relevant actors at the local/regional level were less represented than the actors in the central institutions of the capital city.

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Footnotes

¹ After the collapse of communism, there were eight nations in this area: Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Germany, Poland, Czechia, Slovakia, and Hungary.

² Since 1992, there have been nine parliamentary elections, 16 governments, and 20 defence ministers so far. Also, a defence minister spent in the office 1.45 year on average by 2022. Yet, the Ministry of Defence have either produced or closely collab-

orated on a production of 28 defence and security policy documents

³ The TI accessed a vulnerability of the defence institution by forces of corruption with answering 77 questions divided into five areas (political 1–23, finance 24–34, personnel 35–52, operations 53–57, procurement 58–77). The Czech MOD under the ANO2011 lead rejected to take part in the Government Defence Integrity Index 2020 in response to a criticism of the Transparency International Česká republika, o.p.s. on A. Babiš, prime minister in 2017–2021 and owner of the ANO2011 party.

⁴ The first procurement plan developed as a product of the PPBS expected that the defence institution ought to be operated on 2.5% GDP (MOD 1994).

⁵ According to Zahradník (2005, 23), there were operated 14 military airfields in 7/24 regime and 10 reserve runways in Czechia by 1990 because the military was constructed as offensive one.

⁶ As a co-editor of the White Paper on Defence (MOD 2011), that surprisingly ordered to “Decrease the scope and number of military training areas so as to be appropriate to the CAF needs”, B. Pernica served as an analyst in defence planning at the General Staff (J-5 division) and the MOD (Defence Policy & Strategy division) in 2006–2010. This measurement implemented in 2015 definitely undermined the paradigm of troops distribution over Czechia introduced in the mid-1990s.

⁷ The producer of all-terrain vehicles Tatra was privatized to the Terex Corporation, a former General Motors division, in 2001. In 2003, the Terex got the majority ownership. In 2006, the producer was sold to the Black River, s.r.o.

⁸ There are 27 such towns and cities in Czechia. Their population varies between 30,000 and 1.3 million.

⁹ After the retirement of BVP-2 APCs, there is a potential conversion of the logistics unit in Klatovy to another light infantry battalion and all light infantry battalions (Jindřichův Hradec, Bučovice, and Klatovy) might be affiliated to the airborne regiment in Chrudim. The regiment command would get a brigade command.

¹⁰ A MOD's official, the first armament director. He was commanded by A. Vondra, defence minister (2010–2012), to elaborate a public report on an extent of influence of Omnipol, a defence industry business linked with Christian democrats, on policy of military procurement.

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Supplementary material

Municipality	Municipality (code)	Population (2021)	District	Mechanism used by the interest groups	Development of military presence and an indication of political interests
Bechyně	552054	4.965	CZ0317	special interests	Until 1993, the base served as a military airfield (LKBC), where Mig-21 (Fishbed) planes were operated. In 1995–1998, one reconnaissance battalion was located there. In the period 1998–2003, one engineer regiment was present. Since 2003, there have been the command of engineer brigade/regiment and one engineer regiment. In 2017–2020, there was operated a SAR team. The main engineer training facility was left in Litoměřice were was engineer troop concentrated originally. Bechyně is a domicile of M. Kalousek.
Náměšť nad Oslavou	591211	4.817	CZ0634	special interests	A military airfield (LKNA) where Su-22 (Fitter) and Su-25 (Frogfoot) bombers were operated until 2000 (2002). Since 2001, L-159 Alca have been operated there. Since 2013, Mi-24/35 battle helicopters (Hind) have been operated there due to the closure of the military airfield Přerov. The base was modernized in 2003–2010 with the NSIP support after the MOD took the decision about a prospect of the military installation. The base remains an airfield experiencing the most numerous foggy days annually. The municipality is a part of electoral district where J. Tvrdík, retired senior officer and defence minister (2001–2003), was elected to the Parliament for ČSSD (social democrats) in the 2002 election.
Přerov	511382	42.541	CZ0714	rent- seeking	A former military airfield (LKPO) run by LOM Praha, s.p., a state-owned company under the MOD control, since 2013. The closure of the bases was ordered by the White Paper on Defence issued under the lead of defence minister A. Vondra (2010–2012), a civic democrat (ODS), in 2011. By the government of the Olomoucký Region (CZ071) and local authorities of Přerov led by the ČSSD, the airfield was expected to become a part of regional logistic hub developed by the support of the EU funds.
Tábor	552046	34.119	CZ0317	special interests	Until 1994, there was the military command centre West. In the period 1994–2002, there was a command in charge of an army corps and territorial force. The higher command was ordered to close by M. Kostelka (retired general, defence minister (2003–2004) and resident in Brandýs nad Labem-Stará Boleslav in 200; in favour of Brandýs nad Labem-Stará Boleslav base, Air Force and Logistic command in the 1990s, as a response to cuts in defence budget.
Klatovy	555771	22.14	CZ0322	principal- agent	As a results of lobbying by the government of the Plzeňský region (CZ032) and the authority of Klatovy municipality led by the ODS, a repair battalion specialized in servicing of infantry fighting vehicles BMP-2 (Přáslavice, Hranice na Moravě) was left in the region in 2003 as the last military presence in the area.

Pardubice	555134	91.755 CZ0532	special interests	A military airport (LKPD) shared with the government of the Pardubický region (CZ053) and the authority of municipality of Pardubice since the 1990s who operate an airport terminal there. The airport is used for purposes of training of military pilots outsourced to LOM Praha, s.p. and for military cargo dispatch by the logistic brigade/regiment installed in the Pardubický Region and Královéhradecký Region (CZ052). In addition, there was a combined artillery division until 2010. By lobbying of the authority of Pardubice city led by ODS, this unit was transferred to Jince (CZ020B 540404) in order to utilise potential of the MTA Brdy that was developed for needs of artillery training. The area was closed down and reintegrated under the civil administration in 2015 according to the White Paper on Defence (Pernica and Prudká 2016).
Jindřichův Hradec and Bučovice	545881/592943	21,169/CZ0313/6,491 CZ0646	rent-seeking	A civil defence battalion (engineers) was converted into a light infantry battalion in 2008 in order to get more infantrymen for the ISAF operation. The decision was made by the coalition government composed of ODS, Christian democrats and the Green party (2007–2009). M. Kalousek was minister of finance in this period.
Rakovník	541656	15.652 CZ020C	special interests	Until 2012, the military base was assigned to engineers who were bound to operate in Praha in a case of floods. Troops were transferred to Bechyně in accordance with recommendations of the White Paper on Defence. The military base should re-open in 2025. A lot of military personnel had better go serving at the General Staff of the CAF in order not commute to Bechyně. Also, this closure temporarily solved an understaffing of the MOD due to troublesome service in the locality.
Chrudim	571164	23.14 CZ0531	special interests	MB in Chrudim has never been put on the list of military bases planned for a modernization. However, former commander of the 43 rd airborne infantry battalion as the chief of the General Staff of the CAF decided to promote this unit into a regiment integrating all parachute capabilities in the CAF. Chrudim became the command of a rapid response force. Therefore, a large investment program got priority there, although the CAF does not dispose of air lift capability for a bulk drop.
Karlovarský Region (NUTS3)			principal-agent	After the shift to the AVF, the military presence in the region was reduced only to the military regional office and an office administrating the MTA Hradiště (CZ0412 555177). Due to lobbying by the regional government led from 2016 by ANO2011, a populist party, M. Stropnický (ANO2011), a popular actor and minister of culture (1998), ministry of defence (2014–2017) and minister of foreign affairs (2017–2018), decided to re-develop military presence there by establishing of other institutions for military education and training. The plan embraced a utilization of the civil airport Karlovy Vary (LKKV) for military purpose in order to get a potential of sharing the airfield as the Pardubice military airport.