



CENTRUM TRANSATLANTICKÝCH VZTAHŮ
Prague Centre for Transatlantic Relations

PCTR Newsletter

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Message from the Director

Dear Readers,

We're bringing you the first PCTR Newsletter of the New Year. As usual, you can read about our organized lectures and conferences alongside a summary of significant events related to Transatlantic relations. Together with ongoing conflicts in the Middle East and the threat of the Islamic State, this year will be marked by the presidential election in the United States, which we will keep you informed about in due course.



This year we will continue organizing lectures and conferences for the public. Our first event was a lecture delivered by Major General Israel Ziv, entitled "Counter Terrorism and Counter Insurgency in the Middle East," which took place on January 21 and was of great interest to the public. On February 11, you can look forward to an international conference on "Terrorism and the Ownership of Small Arms: the EU proposal, the Israeli Experience and the Czech Position." You can learn more about other events and publications on our website or social media.

In late January a significant personnel change took place in PCTR. Secretary of the Center for Transatlantic Relations, Luděk Jiráček, received a job offer on the other side of the Atlantic. He had been part of the team since the very beginning of PCTR. Allow me to therefore thank him for his commitment and good work, which certainly greatly contributed to the success of our events and the smooth daily running of PCTR. I would like to wish Luděk good luck in his professional career, and welcome former project manager Jana Leflerová to the position of Secretary of PCTR.

Respectfully yours,

*Alexandr Vondra
Director PCTR*

PCTR Bulletin

On January 21 PCTR organized a public lecture entitled "Counter Terrorism and Counter Insurgency in the Middle East" in the atrium of the CEVRO Institute. The lecture was opened and moderated by Tomáš Pojar, Vice Chancellor of the CEVRO Institute and former Czech ambassador to Israel. The first speaker was Major General Israel Ziv, president of Israel's security and investigative services Global CST Ltd., who previously led the fight against terrorism in a campaign known as "Ebb and Flow." His contribution was followed by Colonel Karel Řehka, Director of Special Forces of the Ministry of Defense of the Czech Republic and former commander of the 601st Special Forces Group.



General Major Israel Ziv began his lecture by describing the development of Islamic terrorism since the 1960s, and then identified key characteristics of the current Islamic State (ISIS). According to General Major Ziv, ISIS is not a completely new phenomenon. However, he stated that the current global strategy to combat terrorism should be adjusted, because without strong global management and a complex, coordinated campaign, our goals cannot be achieved. He also argued that more



attention should be focused on the financial and other resources used by terrorists. Colonel Karel Řehka confirmed the words of General Major Ziv, and added his own practical experience fighting insurgents in Afghanistan. According to Colonel Řehka, ISIS is not only a terrorist organization, although it can be tempting to think so. A discussion followed the lecture. Questions from the audience and from moderator

Tomáš Pojar related to particular tactics in the fight against terrorism, or, for example, the differences between ISIS and Hamas.

PCTR is grateful for the generous support of partners, including Česká zbrojovka (Czech Arms Producers), the International Institute for Counter Terrorism (ICT) at IDC University in Herzliya, and Mr. Peter Mothejl. Many thanks also to the media partners for the event: CEVRO Institute, the Czech-Israeli Chamber of Commerce, and Eretz.cz.

Media coverage from this event can be found on idnes.cz, armadninoviny.cz, and an audio recording [here](#).

Events in Euro-Atlantic Relations (January 2016)

In the New Year Russian President Putin approved an updated national security strategy. Based on this strategy, Russia considers its main security threat to be Western activity in the post-Soviet space. According to the new strategy, Western European support of the unconstitutional Ukrainian revolution is behind the split of Ukraine. Although Moscow is pushing for rapprochement with the USA, the United States, on the other hand, seeks to maintain supremacy in world affairs. Other threats named in the updated strategy include, for instance, cyber attacks and the possibility of terrorists obtaining nuclear weapons. The Russian General Staff soon after published the primary tasks for 2016. The document implies that Russian armed forces should continue to be modernized and should continue the practice of extensive, unannounced military exercises which have been criticized by the West in the past.

<http://www.ceskatelevize.cz/ct24/svet/1647469-rusko-ma-novou-bezpecnostni-strategii-hlavni-hrozbou-jsou-prozapadni-revoluce>, http://www.natoaktual.cz/rusko-bude-pokracovat-v-neohlasenych-manevrech-f5p-/na-zpravu.aspx?c=A160111_095436_na_zpravy_m00

On January 2nd Saudi Arabia executed 47 people convicted of terrorism. One of them was Shiite cleric Nimr Bákir Nimr, whose death sparked a wave of criticism from majority Shiite Iran in particular. During the protests in Tehran, there was an attack the Saudi embassy, causing Saudi Arabia to end diplomatic relations with Iran. In the event of a further increase in tensions, mutual hostilities could escalate into armed conflict, which would further destabilize the Middle East region.

<http://echo24.cz/a/ik7iD/nabozenska-valka-na-blizkem-vychode-odvolani-diplomate-horici-mesity>

At the beginning of January, U.S. President Barack Obama introduced a package of legislative measures to regulate the sale and possession of firearms. The aim is to unify laws of individual states and limit access to guns for people with criminal records. After the failure of President Obama's previous attempts to amend relevant legislation with the approval of Congress, the President decided to bypass the legislature and order change through executive decree.

<http://edition.cnn.com/2016/01/05/politics/obama-executive-action-gun-control/>

A second rotation of Czech military medics left on January 5th for the BLED 2016 exercises in Slovenia. The aim of this participation was to provide support for Slovenian troops in response to the current immigration crisis.

<http://www.acr.army.cz/informacni-servis/zpravodajstvi/dalsi-cesti-vojensti-zdravotnici-odjeli-do-slovinska-pomoc-s-migraci-118251/>

On January 7th Spanish and Belgian Air Forces took over the NATO Baltic Air Policing mission, replacing the Air Forces of Germany and Hungary in protecting the airspace of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. Mission Baltic Air Policing has been running since the entry of the Baltic countries into NATO in 2004. The number of takeoffs of NATO aircraft to Russian aircraft is growing every year - in 2015, the number of takeoffs was 160, while in 2010 there were only 37.

<http://www.lsm.lv/en/article/societ/society/spanish-jets-arrive-to-take-over-air-policing-duties.a162599/>

In an interview with the German Bild on January 11, Russian President Putin expressed his understanding of the situation in Syria. According to Putin, Syrian President Assad did make many mistakes during the conflict, but the rise of terrorism in the region should be ascribed to Western intervention in Iraq, Libya and other countries. As a first step towards achieving a political solution to the conflict in Syria, Mr. Putin called for drafting a new constitution under which elections could be organized. Peace talks on Syria were scheduled to start under UN command on January 25th in Geneva, however, the start of negotiations was postponed several times. Meetings started one week

late and, what's more, were interrupted for several days. The main parties to the conflict - the Syrian government and the opposition - then blamed each other for causing the failure of the negotiations. According to the UN envoy to Syria, Staffan de Mistura, the talks have not concluded and will resume in the second half of February. He welcomed the fact that both sides expressed willingness to start the political process of recovery in Syria.

<http://www.ceskatelevize.cz/ct24/svet/1654525-putin-pro-bild-zapad-chtel-vse-nas-uvrhlo-do-krizi>,
<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35488073>

On January 12 President Obama delivered his final State of the Union address. While evaluating domestic policy, he expressed regret that he failed to overcome divisions between the two main parties and bring change to Washington politics as promised in his campaign. Furthermore, in the speech he indirectly criticized the current favorites for Republican primaries, Donald Trump and Ted Cruz, for their views on dealing with the threat of the Islamic State. According to Obama, it is untrue that the United States will weaken while their enemies strengthen. Conversely, he stated, promoting the Islamic State as an existential threat helps terrorists to spread fear. Concluding his speech, Obama then urged Americans to have greater trust in innovation, which is not to be feared, but rather to be used.

http://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/13/us/politics/obama-state-of-the-union.html?_r=0

In January in the United States, campaigns for nomination for the presidential election peaked. The main theme of the Republican debate on Jan. 14 was the candidates' reactions to President Obama's State of the Union. The president's efforts to limit the possession of firearms then became one of the main topics of debate for Democrats on January 17. The current election favorite, Hillary Clinton tried to obtain and maintain support from supporters of the current President while condemning ties to the gun lobby of her opponent, Bernie Sanders. The last Republican debate before the primaries was held without the participation of the poll-leading Donald Trump. Due to disputes with debate moderator Megyn Kelly, declined to attend and instead spoke at an event supporting war veterans. Caucuses of both major parties traditionally begin in Iowa on February 1, followed by primaries in New Hampshire (Feb. 9), with most states voting in March. According to pre-caucus polls, Iowa was expected to be a tight race for Democrats, with Clinton narrowly defeating Sanders in the end. Ted Cruz won the Iowa caucuses, while Ted Cruz came in 2nd and Marco Rubio 3rd. Failure in the early primaries ended the campaigns of Democrat Martin O'Malley and Republicans Mike Huckabee, Rick Santorum and Rand Paul. Conversely, a media tycoon and former New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg said he will consider running for president as an independent candidate.

<http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/elections/2016/01/17/analysis-clinton-sanders-get-personal-democratic-race-tightens/78931278/>, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-35436721>,
<http://edition.cnn.com/election/primaries/states/ia/>

After the International Atomic Energy Agency confirmed that Iran fulfilled all terms of last July's nuclear agreement, the United States and the European Union canceled sanctions on Tehran on January 16. Shortly after, however, the U.S. introduced new sanctions against Iran in response to Iran's ballistic missile test of medium-range missiles in October last year.

<http://zahranicni.ihned.cz/c1-65103970-den-po-oznameni-o-zruseni-sankci-proti-iranu-na-nej-usa-uvailily-nove-kvuli-testu-balisticke-rakety>

Due to the aggressive policy of Russia towards Ukraine, Poland requested the permanent presence of NATO troops in the country. An agreement was successfully concluded with Britain, which has pledged to send roughly 1,000 troops to Poland as part of a long-term exercise. One of the reasons for the agreement may be Britain's attempt to enforce their demands on the EU (including a proposal to limit social benefits for immigrants from EU countries) which needs the support of Poland. The permanent presence of NATO troops might, however, be understood as a breach of an agreement between NATO and Russia on limiting the number of troops deployed in Central and Eastern Europe.

<http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/jan/22/uk-to-permanently-station-1000-military-personnel-in-poland-from-2017>

The defense ministers of countries participating in the US-led coalition against the Islamic State met in Paris on January 20th to discuss a joint strategy and next steps in the fight against ISIS. The most important task of the coalition, said the French minister, was retaking the Syrian city of Rakka and Iraqi Mosul - cities which are considered the main headquarters of the Islamic state. Participants of the meeting also criticized Russian action in Syria, which, according to them, has been responsible for too many civilian casualties. Also on this occasion, U.S. Defense Secretary Carter announced that he has invited all 26 countries participating in the struggle against the Islamic state to a joint meeting in Brussels. The aim of this meeting will be to ensure sufficient resources for military action in Iraq and Syria.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/checkpoint/wp/2016/01/20/fight-against-the-islamic-state-enters-a-new-phase-with-pledge-from-seven-countries/>

The annual meeting of the World Economic Forum was held in Davos, Switzerland from January 20th to 23rd. The main topic of the meeting was called the "fourth industrial revolution," and centered on technology, artificial intelligence, robotics, and manufacturing automation. Other important topics included the current immigration crisis, the economic crisis in Europe, and global climate change. The World Economic Forum was founded in 1971 as a space for economic leaders, politics experts, and intellectuals to meet and discuss current global challenges.

<http://archiv.ihned.cz/c1-65110230-do-davosu-miri-i-roboti>

A meeting of the NATO Military Committee Chiefs of Defence was held January 20 to 21 in Brussels. The aim of the meeting was to assess the current state of the Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan. Representatives of the countries agreed on the necessity of continuing the mission throughout 2016. Given the current migration crisis, which is significantly affected by the situation in the Middle East and Africa, partnerships in the Mediterranean was also on the negotiations agenda. Progress in the implementation of NATO's Readiness Action Plan was also welcomed.

<http://www.acr.army.cz/informacni-servis/zpravodajstvi/generalporucik-becvar-se-zucastnil-jednani-vojenskeho-vyboru-nato-118734/>

On January 25, the Czech government decided to send additional military assistance to Iraq and Jordan. Both countries are set to receive several million rounds of ammunition, and in the case of Iraq, even weapons. The gifts should serve in the fight against the Islamic State, building on previous military aid from the Czech Republic.

<http://zpravy.aktualne.cz/domaci/cesko-posle-dalsi-vojenskou-pomoc-do-iraku-a-jordanska/r~819e8eccc35211e5819a002590604f2e/>

The European Union launched a new operation on January 25: the Counterterrorism Center of Europol. The center was established in response to an increase in terrorist attacks in Europe, and should ensure radically better information and greater cooperation among Europol Member States. One of the other objectives of the center will be an analysis of current investigations into terrorist offenses.

http://ec.europa.eu/news/2016/01/20160125_en.htm

Czech Brigadier General Francis Mičánek was elected Dean of the NATO Defence College (NDC) in Rome in late January. NDC was founded in the 1950s at the initiative of U.S. President Eisenhower and, in addition to research, focuses on training officers for NATO and the European Union. Francis Mičánek served as Director of the Centre for Security and Military Strategic Studies at the University of Defense in Brno, served as Dean of the NDC, and succeeds Slovenian Daria Daniels Škodnik, who is finishing a three-year term.

http://www.natoaktual.cz/micanek-dekanem-skoly-nato-d00-na-zpravy.aspx?c=A160127_173016_na_zpravy_m00

When presenting the annual report published on January 28, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg warned of the dangers associated with the continuing military activity of Russia, especially Russian presence in the airspace near NATO borders. According to the Secretary General, it also

shows how the growth of instability abroad can affect the security of individual member countries, e.g. through the greatest migration crisis since World War II. Jens Stoltenberg also welcomed the fact that in many Member States there has been a halt in the decline in defense spending. However, very few NATO members complied with the 2015 level of expenditure at the promised 2% of GDP, and therefore still need to increase defense budgets in most European countries due to the deteriorating security situation in the world. According to Stoltenberg, investment in modern technologies is needed most.

http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_127331.htm,

http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_127537.htm?selectedLocale=en,

<http://echo24.cz/a/i3BR5/nato-ruska-vojenska-aktivita-nema-obdoby-od-roku-1945>

On Friday, January 29 a Russian aircraft again entered Turkish airspace. According to representatives of the country, the aircraft crew was repeatedly warned but did not, however, react. Turkish President Erdogan has accused Moscow of escalating tensions in the region and added that in the event of a repeat incident, Russia will have to face the consequences of their actions. The Russians, however, denied all accusations, calling them Turkish propaganda. The culmination of tensions between the two countries occurred after the downing of Russian aircraft in November, which we reported on in a previous PCTR newsletter. The deterioration of relations could contribute to an official confirmation of the information sources close to the Russian secret services, according to which one of the perpetrators of the terrorist attack on a Russian civilian aircraft at the end of October in Egypt could be hiding in Turkey.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/turkey-says-another-russian-jet-violated-turkeys-airspace/2016/01/30/76f3794a-c76e-11e5-b933-31c93021392a_story.html,

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/islamic-state/12127094/Islamic-State-terrorist-who-blew-up-Russian-airliner-identified-and-last-seen-in-Turkey.html>