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Stanislav Polnar

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Soviet nuclear munitions in Czechoslovakia: 1965-1991

STANISLAV POLNAR*

University of Defence, Brno, Czech Republic

Email: stanislav.polnar@unob.cz

ABSTRACT

Under a Czechoslovak-Soviet treaty signed in 1965, the rapidly developing missile forces and air force of the Czechoslovak People's Army (Czech acronym and hereinafter 'ČSLA') were to be strengthened with the addition of nuclear munitions. These were to be used to support planned operations on the so-called Czechoslovak Front. Operation JAVOR consisted of the construction of three nuclear depots, which were manned by special units of the Soviet Army. A new agreement between the CSSR and the USSR was entered into in 1986, extending the existing conditions of storage. Fundamental changes were brought about in 1989 by the Velvet Revolution and the end of the Cold War.

Introduction

The presence of nuclear weapons on the territory of the former Czechoslovakia is one of the most inconsistently interpreted and, at the same time, most interesting questions of recent Czechoslovak history. It is closely linked to the vicissitudes that the shared state of Czechs and Slovaks went through during the Cold War from the 1960s. After the events of November 1989, it became a newsworthy topic in the public domain, it being part and parcel of the uncovering of various state secrets. These revelations were linked to the presence of Soviet troops in Czechoslovakia after the violent suppression of the Prague Spring in August 1968. The overall transition and transformation that Czechoslovak society and the moribund Federation were undergoing included these issues, which fascinated the public. They were also inextricably linked to the search for a new security orientation for the Czech and Slovak Federative Republic (CSFR). This article focuses on the issues related in

*Dr. Stanislav Polnar teaches military theory, history of war, war studies, and general tactics at the University of Defence in Brno, Czech Republic.

Note that this article uses some findings from the author's comprehensive study in the journal *Historie a vojenství* (History and Military Science), No. 4/2023, LXXII, pp. 4-25.

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particular to the storage of Soviet nuclear munitions on Czechoslovak territory. With regards to archival sources, it is necessary to point out that access to Russian archives and the few primary sources held by Czech institutions was either non-existent or extremely limited.

Political and Military Characteristics of the Issue

In November 1945, a few months after the defeat of Nazism, the Red Army left Czechoslovak territory. The communist political elites of Czechoslovakia and the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic had a negative attitude towards any new deployment of Soviet military forces, a stance which was not affected by the escalation of the Cold War or developments after the events of February 1948. In particular, the attitude of the communist presidents Klement Gottwald (1948–1953) and Antonín Novotný (1957–1968) was consistently resistant. In contrast, the position of Antonín Zápotocký (1953–1957) was not entirely clear on the matter. The first Czechoslovak ‘workers’ president, Gottwald, came under strong pressure from Stalin, but eventually declared that the presence of Soviet troops would represent a loss of Czechoslovak sovereignty and cause immense damage to the internal policy of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSČ).¹ However, within the context of the Warsaw Pact’s (WP) shift from the late 1950s to more offensive planning for East-West conflict under the conditions of the use of nuclear weapons, pressure from Moscow, backed by militant sections of the Soviet corps of generals, intensified.² In January 1960, Nikita Khrushchev declared the Soviet Union’s new strategic posture – the ‘revolution’ accentuated the brisance of possible nuclear war.³ The real impact of this new strategy manifested itself in the form of the Second Berlin crisis and the Cuban Missile crisis.⁴ Moreover, in 1960/1961, the independent Czechoslovak Front (CSF) was established as a strategic-operational unit.⁵ Its main tasks were to include possible offensive operations into Western Europe. It goes without saying that in the given situation, the CSF could only be formed by the ČSLA, which increased the pressure placed on the

¹J. Fučík, *Stín jaderné války nad Evropou: ke strategii vojenských bloků, operačním plánům a úloze Československé lidové armády na středoevropském válečném území v letech 1945–1968*, (Prague: Mladá fronta, 2010), pp. 198–199; *Vzpomínky Nikity Sergejeviče Chruščova: magnetofonové nahrávky z období glasnosti*, (Brno: Jota, 2000), pp. 147–148.

²J. Šach, *The Czechoslovak Army in the First Year of “Nuclear” Training*, *Historie a vojenství (History and Military Science)* 64 (2) (2015) p. 27; David M. Glantz, *The Military Strategy of the Soviet Union*, (Oxford: Frank Cass, 2004), p. 170.

³David M. Glantz, *The Military Strategy of the Soviet Union*, (Oxford: Frank Cass, 2004), p. 188.

⁴R. Powell, *Nuclear Deterrence Theory: The Search for Credibility*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 127.

⁵K. Štěpánek & P. Minařík, *Československá lidová armáda na Rýnu*, (Prague: Naše vojsko, 2007), p. 45.

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latter's combat readiness and construction. Last but not least, this arms race put a disproportionate burden on the Czechoslovak economy.

In October 1960, the Soviet side communicated to the Czechoslovak leadership its intention to arm the ČSLA with new operational-tactical missiles (Czech acronym OTR). The plan was approved at a meeting of the Political Consultative Committee of the Warsaw Pact in March 1961, and on 30 August 1961 the two parties entered into the *Agreement on the Supply of Special Material from the USSR to the CSSR for the Years 1961–1965*. As a result, from September 1961 to early 1963, the 311, 321 and 331 Heavy Artillery Brigades were established in the garrison town of Hranice na Moravě with missile equipment supplied by the USSR. However, this did not involve any nuclear warheads, whose ownership and disposal were meticulously guarded by Moscow. There was therefore a fundamental contradiction in the combat readiness requirement of the Czechoslovak missile formations. This was reflected in particular in the wording of the 1964 *Plan for the Use of the ČSLA in the Case of War*. According to the operational paper, the 311 Heavy Artillery Brigade fell under the First Army and the 321 Brigade fell under the Fourth Army of the CSF, for which it was planned to use the entire nuclear inventory of 131(!) tactical missiles and gravity bombs.⁶

The use of Czechoslovak nuclear delivery systems to transport Soviet nuclear munitions to the target was automatically incorporated into other ČSLA operational plans (1977 and 1986). This also applied to the operational document from July of the watershed year 1989. It was originally intended that Czechoslovak missile and air units would receive nuclear munitions from the USSR in time for operation but no earlier than 18 hours, which meant a considerable delay in terms of achieving full combat readiness. To solve this problem, three mobile missile technical bases were established within the ČSLA in 1963, and a year later, helicopter swarms within the heavy artillery brigades for transporting nuclear munitions.⁷ It should be noted that these munitions were tactical nuclear weapons of smaller calibres. For example, in the case of gravity bombs for the Czechoslovak Su-7s, the equivalent of eight to ten kilotons of TNT.⁸

Even this solution, however, did not satisfy the Soviet generals, with the then command of the ČSLA (General Bohumír Lomský, Minister of National Defence, and General

⁶P. Luňák, *We Are in Lyon in Nine Days: Plan for the Use of the Czechoslovak People's Army in the Case of War in 1964*, *Soudobé dějiny* (Contemporary History) 8 (7) (2000), p. 414.

⁷P. Tomek, *Missile Delivery Systems of Nuclear Weapons on the Territory of Czechoslovakia*, *Historie a vojenství* (History and Military Science) 61 (3) (2012), pp. 73–74.

⁸J. Hlaváček, *Vzestup a pád ČSLA?: vojenská profese v kolektivní paměti důstojnického sboru (1960–1970)*, (Prague: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR 2019), p. 205.

Otakar Rytíř, Chief of the General Staff) developing its own initiative in this regard. The system in force from 1962, according to which the transport of nuclear warheads and gravity bombs to Czechoslovak troops from the USSR was to take 18 to 22 hours in the most favourable situation, appeared generally insufficient. The amount of time appeared too long to the officials of the USSR Ministry of Defence and the Warsaw Pact Supreme Command of Joint Forces (Czech acronym HV SOS). This predicament was compounded by the political thesis of the 22nd Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) in October 1961, according to which the Western 'imperialist' countries were preparing a sudden nuclear attack against the countries of the socialist community. The new requirement favoured a much faster operational speed, according to which nuclear weapons would be delivered to the Czechoslovak missile troops within 3 hours!⁹ The opinion in Warsaw Pact command circles at that time was increasingly assuming that NATO could initiate a future conflict with a surprise nuclear strike. If this were to be the case, CSF troops would initiate combat operations without the use of their own nuclear weapons, relying on the effects of Soviet strategic strikes deep behind the defences of the Western countries.

The aforementioned considerations did not only remain at the level of discussions among military experts. The delivery of special nuclear munitions from the USSR to the CSSR was regulated by two conventions between the Czechoslovak and Soviet parties – one dating from 30 August 1961 and the other from 23 February 1962. Each convention was based on a somewhat divergent assumption (see above) that the next nuclear war would be preceded by a brief period of increased international tension. This would therefore allow the delivery of nuclear weapons to Czechoslovak formations before the start of combat operations. The text of the first convention of 30 August 1961 stipulated that nuclear warheads were to be stored in the USSR. Their delivery to the CSSR and the preparation of the missile sets for firing were assumed to occur only after a special meeting and in the event of an emergency.¹⁰ Under the second convention of 23 February 1962, a procedure was proposed under which the handling of nuclear munitions was entrusted to special Soviet brigades. These were to be moved onto Czechoslovak territory as required.¹¹

⁹The Prague Archives of the Chamber of Deputies ('Prague ACD'), Federal Assembly Collection, Period VI, File No. 17 of the Defence Security Committee, entry: Nuclear Weapons in the CSSR, Ref. No.: 08/242-46 of 14 November 1991.

¹⁰Prague ACD, Federal Assembly Collection, Period VI, File No. 17 of the Defence Security Committee, entry: Nuclear Weapons in the CSSR, Extract from the Archive of the General Staff of the Czechoslovak Army, Document as of 25 May 1965 for VKO (p. 435, p. 437).

¹¹Prague ACD, Federal Assembly Collection, Period VI, File No. 17 of the Defence Security Committee, entry: Nuclear Weapons in the CSSR, Extract from the Archive of the General Staff of the Czechoslovak Army, p. 1.

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In the end, however, the option that prevailed was based on the necessity to reconcile the delivery of nuclear munitions and achieving the combat readiness of ČSLA units within 3 hours. Marshal Andrei Antonovich Grechko, the First Deputy Soviet Minister of Defence, expressed the matter quite succinctly at a meeting in Legnica, Poland, held on 16 - 21 March 1965,

It is possible to consider the deployment of special warheads on the territory of the CSSR with Soviet manning, provided the government of the CSSR so requests, and provided the government of the USSR gives its consent to this. In such a case, it would be possible to provide consultations for the particular settlement of all questions in terms of the military lines.¹²

This, of course, represented a break with the previous Czechoslovak position of refusing the deployment of Soviet troops in the CSSR. However, the pressure to locate Soviet nuclear munitions depots in Czechoslovakia must also be understood within the broader geopolitical and strategic context of the mid-1960s. The thoughts of the Soviet side were strongly influenced by new strategic concepts and the configuration of the armed forces of the NATO alliance, which significantly changed the balance of forces in the European theatre of war. According to official data from the US Pentagon and the US Secretary of Defense (Robert McNamara) in 1965, the USA outnumbered the Soviet Union 9:1 in the number of nuclear warheads and 4:1 in their delivery systems.¹³ After the arrival of the new General Secretary of the Central Committee of the CPSU (Leonid Brezhnev) in October 1964, the Soviets dramatically stepped up their efforts to match and then overcome American nuclear superiority.

The ČSLA command eventually succumbed to intense Soviet pressure and, in May 1965, submitted a proposal for negotiations between the Czechoslovak Ministry of National Defence and the Supreme Command of the Allied Armed Forces to the Military Committee of Defence (Czech acronym VKO) of the Central Committee of

¹²Prague ACD, Federal Assembly Collection, Period VI, File No. 17 of the Defence Security Committee, entry: Nuclear Weapons in the CSSR, Extract from the Archive of the General Staff of the Czechoslovak Army, p. 2; Prague ACD, Federal Assembly Collection, Period VI, File No. 17 of the Defence Security Committee, entry: Nuclear Weapons in the CSSR, Interpellation by Marián Čalfa, Prime Minister of the Czechoslovak Federal Republic, Jiří Dienstbier, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the CSFR and Deputy Prime Minister of the CSFR, and Luboš Dobrovský, Minister of Defence of the CSFR, Pavel Jégl, Ladislav Lis and Jiří Soukup, Members of the Federal Assembly, Prague, 16 April 1991, p. 1.

¹³J. Madry, *Soviet Interests in the Concept of the Defence of Czechoslovakia (1965-1970)*, *Historie a vojenství (History and Military Science)* 41 (5) (1992), p. 126.

the KSČ. Under the 25 May 1965 proposal, the VKO of the KSČ Central Committee instructed President Antonín Novotný to discuss the issue with the Presidium of the CPSU Central Committee, as well as instructing General Lomský to discuss it with the Soviet military command. Meetings of the Soviet Central Committee took place in October and in November 1965, for which the main officials of the ČSLA were invited to Moscow. In addition to the aforementioned generals, Lomský and Rytíř, the invited officials included the Chief of Operations of the General Staff of the ČSLA, General Vitanovský, the Chief of Missile Troops and Artillery of the ČSLA, General Blatenský, and the Chief of the Accommodation and Production Section, Colonel Roháč. In Moscow, a new treaty was drawn up, which, upon their return to Prague, was submitted for approval to Antonín Novotný, who, on 17 November, authorised General Lomský to sign the treaty on behalf of the CSSR government.¹⁴ The actual *Treaty between the Government of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and the Government of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic on Measures to Increase the Combat Readiness of Missile Troops* was then entered into in Prague on 15 December 1965. The document was signed by Marshal Grechko for the Soviet side, and was based on it being in force for a period of at least 10 years, with the possibility of automatic extension in the event that the parties did not raise any objections in the year prior to its expiry.

Under the Treaty, the parties agreed to deploy nuclear munitions on the territory of the CSSR. For this purpose, three depot facilities were to be built by the end of the first half of 1967 (Article 1 of the Treaty).¹⁵ The Soviet party undertook to carry out the design of the facilities, the technical management of their construction, and the supply and installation of the special depot facilities' internal equipment. The CSSR undertook to pay the expenses for the construction of the structures, to carry out their construction, to construct access roads to the facilities, and to provide energy supplies (Article 2 of the Treaty). The Soviet party undertook to protect, maintain, service and provide timely preparations for the release of nuclear munitions. Meanwhile, a missile-technical base consisting exclusively of Soviet soldiers without uniforms, i.e. in civilian clothes, was to be formed in each facility. The representatives of both parties stipulated that the units of the USSR Armed Forces would be fully under the command of the Soviet government, which would decide on the manner of their use. The Czechoslovak party assumed the obligation to accept and move the

¹⁴Prague ACD, Federal Assembly Collection period VI, file no. 17 of the Defence Security Committee, entry: Nuclear Weapons in the CSSR, ref. no.: 08/242-46 of 14 November 1991, p. 3.

¹⁵ V. Mastny and M. Byrne, *A Cardboard Castle?: An Inside History of the Warsaw Pact 1955-1991*, (Budapest New York: Central European University Press, 2005), pp. 30-31.

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prepared nuclear munitions to its own missile-technical bases. To this end, it was necessary to maintain the necessary number of special transporters in the missile-transport units (Article 5 of the Treaty). The parties agreed that the entry of people into any of the three premises after their takeover would be possible only with the written permission of the Minister of Defence and the Chief of the General Staff of the USSR Armed Forces. Control over the organisation and the performance of duties at the facilities was vested in the senior Soviet representative of the HV SOS in the CSSR (Article 6 of the Treaty). The provision of the members of the Soviet armed forces and their families with all kinds of supplies was the responsibility of the Soviet party (Article 7 of the Treaty). The last major issue was the question of connection. The Czechoslovak party undertook to secure the facilities by means of line communications and by connecting them to the national communications network of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic. It was also planned to connect the facilities to the General Staff of the USSR Armed Forces using their own radio equipment.

Operation JAVOR formed only a small part of the Soviet nuclear munitions depot system. In the USSR alone, there were about two hundred such special military facilities. Similar projects were established and built in other Eastern Bloc countries, such as East Germany, Poland, Hungary and Bulgaria. For example, in the neighbouring People's Republic of Poland, similar depots were codenamed VISTULA.¹⁶ In the 1980s, this nuclear empire was placed directly under the 12 Administration of the Soviet Ministry of Defence.¹⁷

The locations of the future depots were not determined, as might expected, by the Soviet side, but by the ČSLA command.¹⁸ These were at the locations of the military training areas of Jince (Míšov-Borovno), Mimoň (Bělá pod Bezdězem) and Bílina (Červený Újezd near Lovosice). Owing to suspicion and distrust on the Soviet side, Czechoslovak design engineers received only rough specifications. The delivery of technology was vested solely in the hands of the Soviets. Even the location of the depots while under construction was strictly subject to rules of secrecy, to protect

¹⁶The programme in Poland was an analogy of Operation JAVOR in Czechoslovakia. It was based on the top secret agreement concluded between Poland and the Soviet Union on 25 February 1967. The nuclear weapons were finally removed from Poland during 1990. In: J. Pařka, *The Vistula Programme. Nuclear Weapons for The Polish People's Army in Case of War*, *Kwartalnik Historyczny CXXV* (2) (2018), p. 84.

¹⁷V. Mohyla, et al., *Už nemusíme mlčet: operačně-taktické rakety ČSLA v období studené války*, (Brno: Tribun EU, 2013), p. 386.

¹⁸Briefing Note for 1st Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, c. A. Dubček, Prague, May 1968. In: P. Luňák, *Plánování nemyslitelného: československé válečné plány 1950–1990*, (Prague: Dokořán, 2019), p. 241.

information on them from the intelligence activities of NATO countries. As early as the 1960s, detecting the handling of radioactive material was possible thanks to advanced satellite reconnaissance methods. However, all Soviet nuclear weapons depots were erected close to Czechoslovak uranium deposits, especially in the Ore Mountains and Jáchymov. Natural ionising radiation could therefore satisfactorily cover radiation emitted during the handling of nuclear warheads.¹⁹

The operation was given the codename JAVOR (Maple) and the nuclear depot sites under construction were given the numerical identifiers 50, 51 and 52 (No. 50 Javor Bílina, No. 51 Javor Borovno-VVP Jince and No. 52 Javor Bělá pod Bezdězem). However, their implementation in the field soon lagged behind the ambitious plan. Work on Javor 52 did not commence until 8 April 1966. On 30 September 1966, a contract for the supply of equipment for the JAVOR facilities was signed. Afterwards, the technical equipment was delivered by special Soviet military transports, with the shipments packed in crates, each of which was marked with a special code.

The 'revival process' of 1968, better known in the West as the 'Prague Spring', brought secret negotiations between the highest political and military officials about the purpose and pace of construction.²⁰ Already before the August invasion it was concluded that the facilities in Mimoň and Jince could only be completed in the fourth quarter of 1968, and the facility near Lovosice theoretically not until the first half of 1969. The Ministry of National Defence stated that this would mean a fundamental change in the status of Czechoslovakia as a country without the presence of foreign troops and without the deployment of nuclear weapons. This was despite the fact that the presence was to involve 'only' some 750 to 800 Soviet citizens, including family members. Minister Lomský and Chief of the General Staff Rytíř, however, even in the atmosphere of reform, stressed that the defence of the countries of the socialist community required and fully justified such measures. Rather than complicating matters, the events of 21 August 1968 accelerated them. On 13–14 November of the same year, the two 'partner' General Staffs drew up a protocol. It specified the arrangements for handing over the facilities to the designated Soviet special forces.

Some provisions of the *Czechoslovak-Soviet Treaty on the Stationing of Soviet Troops in Czechoslovakia* of 16 October 1968, i.e. the law underpinning the legality of the occupation, refer to Operation JAVOR.²¹ For example, the fact that the special units

¹⁹M. Kruml, *Utajená smrt*, Mladý svět 33 (12) (1991), p. 14.

²⁰First Secretary of the Communist Party, Alexander Dubček, was continuously informed about Operation JAVOR. In: P. Luňák, *Plánování nemyslitelného: československé válečné plány 1950–1990*, (Prague: Dokořán, 2019), pp. 241–243.

²¹Decree of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of 20 December 1968 on the Treaty between the Government of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic and the Government

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in the JAVOR facilities were to be subject to the commander of the Soviet troops in Czechoslovakia in matters of garrison duty, discipline, etc., can be considered important. Professionally, however, they fell under the direct subordination of the General Staff of the USSR Armed Forces.²² The construction carried out by the Czechoslovak side was successfully completed during 1969, with the total cost of implementation amounted to the then astronomical sum of CZK 173.91 million. After the takeover by the Joint Technical Committee, the facilities in Borovno and Bělá were occupied by special Soviet troops in April 1969 and the facility in Bílina in February 1970.²³ There were considerable delays between the takeover of the facilities and their actual occupation by Soviet troops. For example, the latter site – Javor 50 in Bílina – had already been taken over by the Soviet side from General Pícek in December 1969.²⁴ Another change to the planned operation was the 1974 abolition of the transport helicopter swarms of each Czechoslovak artillery brigade. Instead, groups were formed within the missile brigades to collect live warheads from JAVOR facilities using trucks with isothermal superstructures and truck cranes.

A so-called missile crisis erupted between the Warsaw Pact and NATO in 1983, during which US cruise missiles and Pershing-2 nuclear delivery vehicles were deployed in various Western European NATO alliance countries.²⁵ Both parties contributed to the escalation of tensions, which was reflected in the signing of a new treaty – the *Czechoslovak-Soviet Treaty on the Construction of Special Facilities on the Territory of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic and on the Provision of Housing Facilities and Barracks of the Czechoslovak-Soviet Armed Forces for Temporary Use by the Central Group of Soviet Troops* (Czech SkSV) – on 2 November 1983.²⁶ The Soviet 122 Missile Brigade, armed with

of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on the Conditions of the Temporary Stationing of Soviet Troops on the Territory of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic No. 11/1969 Coll.

²²Briefing Note for the President of the CSSR, c. L. Svoboda, approved by him on 22 November 1968, in: P. Luňák, *Plánování nemyslitelného: československé válečné plány 1950–1990*, (Prague: Dokořán, 2019), p. 245.

²³Prague ACD, Federal Assembly Collection, Period VI, File No. 17 of the Defence Security Committee, entry: Nuclear Weapons in the CSSR, Ref. No.: 08/242-46 of 14 November 1991, p. 4.

²⁴Prague ACD, Federal Assembly Collection, Period VI, File No. 17 of the Defence Security Committee, entry: Nuclear Weapons in the CSSR, Extract from the Archive of the General Staff of the Czechoslovak Army, p. 3.

²⁵ B. Litera, *Od Stalina ke Gorbačovovi: mezinárodní postavení a politika komunistické supervelmoci 1945–1991*, (Prague: Dokořán, 2019), p. 276.

²⁶The large scale NATO Exercise Able Archer held in November 1983 was so realistic it almost caused a pre-emptive Soviet nuclear strike. In: N. Jones, *Able Archer 83: The Secret History of the NATO Exercise that almost Triggered Nuclear War*, (New York: The

39 OTR-22 Temp S, moved to the Hranice na Moravě garrison for the Christmas holidays. It had at its disposal three firing positions, namely WEST (Přáslavice), NORTH (Stará Voda) and SOUTH (Zelený Kříž) in the Libavá Military Training Area. The Soviet missile brigade was not part of the SSkSV, and if it had nuclear warheads for its own OTRs, they would have likely been stored at the individual firing positions. The SSkSV itself had two other Soviet missile formations: these were the OTR R-300 missile brigade with 12 launchers (stationed near Turnov); and the 442 Tactical Missile Brigade (TR) Točka in the Mimoň-Hvězdiv Military Area.²⁷ The command of the ČSLA had no access to the premises of these or other Soviet military formations and was not informed about their activities in any way. The possible presence there of nuclear warheads can only be speculation.²⁸

Under the treaty of 15 December 1965, the facilities were run within the context of Operation JAVOR until February 1986, when the USSR MoD sent a courier with an official letter to the Czechoslovak Federal Ministry of National Defence announcing the Soviet side's termination of the original treaty. At the same time, the draft of a new treaty was enclosed. The Minister of National Defence of the CSSR, Army General Milan Václavík, and Chief of the General Staff of the ČSLA, Colonel General Miloslav Blahník, discussed the matter with the Secretary General of the Central Committee of the KSČ and the President of the Republic, Gustáv Husák, who authorised Minister Václavík to sign the new treaty. On 21 February 1986, the *Treaty between the Government of the USSR and the Government of the CSSR on the Deployment of Nuclear-Armed Bases on the Territory of the CSSR* was signed in Moscow. It was signed under the aforementioned presidential authorisation of 17 February of the same year by the Minister of National Defence for Czechoslovakia for an indefinite period of

New Press), p. 57; Prague ACD, Federal Assembly Collection, Period VI, File No. 17 of the Defence Security Committee, entry: Nuclear Weapons in the CSSR, Reply to the Interpellation of the Members of the Federal Assembly, p. 2.

²⁷ Prague ACD, Federal Assembly Collection, Period VI, File No. 17 of the Defence Security Committee, entry: Nuclear Weapons in the CSSR, Request of the Defence and Security Committees of the House of the People and the House of Nations of the Federal Assembly of 23 April 1991 addressed to the President of the Federal Assembly, Alexander Dubček.

²⁸ Prague ACD, Federal Assembly Collection, Period VI, File No. 17 of the Defence Security Committee, entry: Nuclear Weapons in the CSSR, Reply to the Interpellation of the Members of the Federal Assembly, p. 3.

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time.²⁹ In terms of content, it was a substantive amendment to the original treaty of 1965.³⁰ In practice the terms of both were followed until the beginning of 1990.

From 1986, however, in connection with reforms in the USSR, there were shifts in East–West relations, which, to some extent, affected the presence of nuclear weapons and their delivery systems in Czechoslovakia. On 15 January 1986, Mikhail Gorbachev, General Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee, declared that the Soviet Union was willing to negotiate with the USA for the global elimination of nuclear weapons within 15 years. To that effect, global denuclearisation was to take place in three stages by 2000, so that mankind would enter the third millennium free from the threat of nuclear war on land, in the air, at sea, or in outer space.³¹ Within the context of the 27 Congress of the CPSU (25 February to 6 March 1986), efforts were made to design a comprehensive international security system acceptable to Moscow, and one that could eliminate the Soviet technical and economic lag behind the countries of the North Atlantic Alliance. On 8 December 1987, Ronald Reagan, the US President, and Mikhail Gorbachev signed the *Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty*. Under this treaty the Soviet 122 Missile Brigade began to be withdrawn back to the USSR on 25 February 1988.³² The Stará Voda and Zelený Kříž launch sites were subsequently handed over to the ČSLA. The Přešlavice facility was not taken over by Czechoslovakia until 28 April 1990.

The facilities built under Operation JAVOR were fully responsive to the Soviet strategic interests during the Cold War. Nuclear weapons held there were intended for both the Soviet Army and the ČSLA. In total, their number was not insignificant. The figure is derived from the number of nuclear weapon delivery systems in any given planned operation. This information, in turn, is based on the operational directives of the HV SOS. However, neither the Rocket Army (from 1962) nor the ČSLA Air Force, nor the leadership of the Ministry of National Defence, ever had these assets at their

²⁹Prague ACD, Federal Assembly Collection, Period VI, File No. 17 of the Defence Security Committee, entry: Nuclear Weapons in the CSSR, Construction and Use of Special Facilities on the Territory of the CSFR, p. 1.

³⁰Prague ACD, Federal Assembly Collection, Period VI, File No. 17 of the Defence Security Committee, entry: Nuclear Weapons in the CSSR, Interpellation by Marián Čalfa, Prime Minister of the CSFR, Jiří Dienstbier, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the CSFR and Deputy Prime Minister of the CSFR, and Luboš Dobrovský, Minister of Defence of the CSFR, Prague, 16 April 1991, p. 2.

³¹M. S. Gorbačov, *Vybrané projevy a stati*, (Prague: Svoboda 1986), pp. 466–469.

³²M. S. Gorbačov, *Přestavba a nové myšlení pro naši zemi a pro celý svět*, (Prague: Svoboda 1987), pp. 208–209; P. Tomek, *Security Aspects of Nuclear Missile Deployment in Czechoslovakia in Autumn 1983 and Public Reaction*, *Historie a vojenství* (History and Military Science) 68 (2) (2019), p. 19.

direct disposal, which was in line with Soviet nuclear doctrine at the time³³. The Soviet side alone determined where weapons were to be stored, and their collection by the ČSLA would only take place during the preparation for operations.³⁴ According to the war plan of 1989, the CSF would use a total of 546(!) nuclear weapons in defensive operations.³⁵ From these numbers we can partially infer the total storage capacity of all three JAVOR facilities.

Secrecy and Activities of the Security Forces

Article 3 of the *Treaty on the Deployment of Soviet Nuclear Weapons on Czechoslovak Territory* of December 1965 defined the basic principles of information protection. Under this article, Operation JAVOR was to be a state secret for its entire duration. The Czechoslovak party undertook to operationally conceal the facilities throughout their construction and operation. In this respect, the ČSLA was given the task of ensuring their security and cover by the ground forces and air defence.³⁶

Shortly before 20 February 1969, an undated meeting on Operation JAVOR took place in the presence of the leading Soviet operational officers and commanders of the Soviet missile forces, Generals Zuvaliev, Kozlov, Gaivoronsky, Medvedev and Gumenyuk. On the Czechoslovak side, the new Chief of the General Staff of the ČSLA, General Karel Rusov, along with Generals Kučera and Vostera, attended. The meeting accepted Czechoslovakia's proposal to explain the presence of the special Soviet units in the depots as cable communication units under the direct subordination of the General Staff of the USSR Armed Forces.³⁷ As already stated, the Soviet soldiers involved in Operation JAVOR were required to wear civilian clothes while on duty in order to make it difficult to identify them. The written guidelines governing the issue were kept by the Ministry of National Defence (Czech MNO) and the ČSLA under

³³V. Mohyla, et al., *Už nemusíme mlčet: operačně-taktické rakety ČSLA v období studené války*, (Brno: Tribun EU, 2013), p. 61; David M. Glantz, *The Military Strategy of the Soviet Union*, (Oxon: Frank Cass, 2004), pp. 206–208.

³⁴Prague ACD, Federal Assembly Collection, Period VI, File No. 17 of the Defence Security Committee, entry: Nuclear Weapons in the CSSR, Information on Soviet Facilities Located on the Territory of the CSFR, pp. 2–3.

³⁵P. Luňák, *Plánování nemyslitelného: československé válečné plány 1950-1990*, (Prague: Dokořán, 2019), p. 341.

³⁶P. Luňák, *Plánování nemyslitelného: československé válečné plány 1950-1990*, (Prague: Dokořán, 2019), p. 236.

³⁷Prague ACD, Federal Assembly Collection, Period VI, File No. 17 of the Defence Security Committee, entry: Nuclear Weapons in the CSSR, Extract from the Archive of the General Staff of the Czechoslovak Army – Notes on Operation Javor.

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the strictest regime classification – Top Secret Special Importance.³⁸ Nuclear munitions were referred to as ‘special’ and their delivery systems as ‘means’.

The construction of the Javor 50, 51 and 52 facilities was known only to a very small circle of Czechoslovak officials under the code name K-22.³⁹ The First Secretary of the Central Committee of the KSČ and the President of the CSSR, Antonín Novotný, personally approved the so-called *List of People Familiar with the Facts Connected with the Storage of Nuclear Weapons on the Territory of the CSSR*. This document listed the names of only eleven people who knew the crucial circumstances of the storage in every detail. Apart from Novotný himself, these included the then Prime Minister of the CSSR, Jozef Lenárt, and, of course, nine senior officials of the MNO, headed by Minister Lomský.

The personnel in charge of the construction and use of the facilities first underwent a thorough security clearance check by the ‘relevant authorities’. After the Soviet takeover of the facilities, unauthorised people could enter the technical parts of the facilities only with the permission of the Soviet Minister of Defence and the Chief of the General Staff of the USSR Armed Forces. This practice was confirmed by Army General Miroslav Vacek, Chief of the General Staff of the ČSLA from 1987 to 1989. According to his recollections, the Czechoslovak People’s Army did not own or manage the nuclear munitions. Vacek admitted that, by virtue of his position, he had had the opportunity to ask the Soviet command to visit any of the three depots, but because he had been overwhelmed by his duties he never had the time to do so during his two year tenure as head of the army.⁴⁰ According to him, the command of the ČSLA should have got this information from the Soviet side only at a time of international tension preceding the outbreak of a possible war between the East and the West. The two treaties of 1965 and 1986 are rare documents, as each was produced only in duplicate (Russian and Czech). One copy was retained by the Soviet command, while the other was kept in a special vault in the Operational Administration Unit of the ČSLA General Staff, with the right to handle it limited to

³⁸See, for example, the Act on the Protection of State Secrets No. 102/1971 Coll. and the Decree of the Government of the CSSR on the Protection of Economic and Official Secrets No. 148/1971 Coll.

³⁹I. Pejčoch, *Nosiče jaderné výzbroje v Československé lidové armádě*, and in: I. Pejčoch & P. Tomek, *ČSLA a NLA v rámci Varšavské smlouvy*, (Prague: Ministerstvo obrany České republiky, 2014), p. 36.

⁴⁰M. Vacek, *Generál studené války*, (Prague: Nakladatelství Erika 2004), p. 134.

the Minister of Defence, the Chief of the General Staff, and the Chief of the Operations Administration.⁴¹

It was strictly forbidden to engage in any written correspondence (including encrypted messages) or telephone conversations about any facts concerning Operation JAVOR. Any discussions on the issue could only take place in person between officials with security clearance and the necessary authorisation. Members of the Soviet special forces were allowed to interact with local people only in the most extreme cases. However, there had to be a certain brief associated with ensuring the operation of the 'Javors' by the Czechoslovak side, which was explained as the 'construction and operation of facilities for the Soviet Army's special cable communication unit'. Under this cover, several other MNO personnel became aware of the existence of these facilities.⁴²

The protection and physical security of Javor 50, 51 and 52 was supported by their location. The Borovno and Bělá pod Bezdězem depots were located on the very edge of military training areas. This did not apply, however, to the Bílina facility. Nonetheless, all the depots were located close to the edge of a forest. The site of each Javor was surrounded by a wire fence and a wall with sensors to detect intruders, and there were no visible defensive elements, such as military structures, on the outside.⁴³ Inside the fencing was the 'S' area which was secured by guards and a surveillance service. The outer perimeter was always guarded by a platoon from the motorised artillery units of the Soviet army. This unit had no information about the real significance of the facility they guarded and its members could not enter it. Other areas outside the 'S' zone were guarded in the same way as standard Soviet and Czechoslovak units. The credibility of the Javor facilities as special cable communication units was aided by the fact that it was very difficult to visually distinguish missile technical security vehicles from ordinary radio vehicles.⁴⁴ This is one of the reasons why representatives of the Czechoslovak civilian administration visited the JAVOR facilities several times as part of 'friendship' work without learning anything about the real mission of the special Soviet units.

⁴¹Prague ACD, Federal Assembly Collection, Period VI, File No. 17 of the Defence Security Committee, entry: Nuclear Weapons in the CSSR, Ref. No.: 08/242-46 of 14 November 1991, p. 6.

⁴²Prague ACD, Federal Assembly Collection, Period VI, File No. 17 of the Defence Security Committee, entry: Nuclear Weapons in the CSSR, ref. no.: 08/242-46 of 14 November 1991, pp. 3 - 4.

⁴³V. Mohyla & V. Šufajzl, *Taktické jaderné prostředky ČSLA*, (Prague: Československý spisovatel, 2012), p. 59.

⁴⁴V. Mohyla, et al., *Už nemusíme mlčet: operačně-taktické rakety ČSLA v období studené války*, (Brno: Tribun EU, 2013), p. 392.

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Paradoxically, the greatest security risk to Operation JAVOR arose before the completion of all three facilities in 1968. It was associated with the defection of Major General Jan Šejna to the United States on 25 February 1968 and his subsequent collaboration with US intelligence services. Šejna had long enjoyed the trust of Antonín Novotný, had served as the head of the secretariat of Minister Lomský, and in 1964 took the important position of Secretary of the Main Committee of the KSČ at the Ministry of National Defence.⁴⁵ By virtue of his position, he also came into indirect contact with Operation JAVOR. His defection to the West triggered speculation about possible leaks of this top-secret military programme. Before his defection Šejna had often been in the vicinity of the construction of Javor 50 in Bílina. The reason for this being that he personally knew the former site manager of Military Construction in Litoměřice. It was this firm that participated in the construction work of the Bílina 'atomic' facility. However, an investigation conducted after Šejna's defection revealed that he had never set foot in the premises of Javor 50.⁴⁶

The State Security Service (Czech StB) and the Military Counterintelligence Service (Czech VKR) played a key role in the Czechoslovak system of secrecy. Since the Javor 50, 51 and 52 facilities were formally presented as cable communication units, the Czechoslovak security forces viewed them as units of the Central Group of Soviet Forces stationed in Czechoslovakia after 21 August 1968. It is understandable that the StB would have cooperated with the Soviet KGB on the issue from the early 1970s. Both services focused their attention on visual espionage by NATO intelligence services. In addition, Czechoslovak State Security monitored very closely any hostile action by the population of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic towards the Soviet troops on Czechoslovak territory,⁴⁷

The decisive role was played by the Second Administration of the National Security Force (Czech SNB), the Counterintelligence Administration for the Fight against External Enemies. According to its 1975 organisational regulations, it was involved in the protection of those facilities and places where Soviet troops were stationed on the territory of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, in cooperation with the Third Administration (VKR) and the State Security Corps Committee of the USSR Council

⁴⁵D. Povolný, *Vojenské řešení Pražského jara. I. Invaze armád Varšavské smlouvy*, (Prague: MO ČR – AVIS, 2008), p. 16; A. Benčík, *Operace "Dunaj": vojáci a Pražské jaro 1968. Studie a dokumenty*, (Prague: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR, 1994), p. 12.

⁴⁶P. Luňák, *Plánování nemyslitelného: československé válečné plány 1950-1990*, (Prague: Dokořán, 2019), p. 243.

⁴⁷P. Tomek & I. Pejčoch, *Černá kniha sovětské okupace: Sovětská armáda v Československu a její oběti 1968–1991*, (Cheb: Svět křídél, 2018), p. 45.

of Ministers (KGB) at the Central Group of Troops.⁴⁸ In the same year, the tasks of the VKR were specified, and included providing, to a specified extent, external 'state security' protection for Soviet troops temporarily stationed on Czechoslovak territory as well as the troops and staffs of Warsaw Pact armies during their stay in Czechoslovakia. In 1980, the responsibility of the Second SNB Administration were expanded to include detecting attempts by enemy intelligence agencies to infiltrate the Soviet army units stationed in Czechoslovakia.⁴⁹ The Javor 50, 51 and 52 facilities were logistically supplied directly from the USSR so the VKR also responsibility from 1972 of cooperation with territorial StB units and ensuring the security of the transport of military cargo to the Soviet troops.⁵⁰

The Velvet Revolution (1989) and Media Coverage of the Issue

The events of November 1989 in Czechoslovakia impacted Operation JAVOR. The Cold War ended and the two formerly hostile blocs searched hard for a new balance of power in Europe. As a result of a long-standing regime of absolute secrecy, various assumptions, conjecture or outright false information proliferated in Czechoslovakia on the presence of nuclear weapons in Czechoslovak territory. Articles on this subject appeared in the pages of the daily press during March and April 1990. The United States asked both Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union to clarify, in relation to the previously mentioned *Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty* of December 1987, whether any Soviet SS-23 missile systems had been stationed on Czechoslovak territory.⁵¹ The issue of the 'twenty-three-warheads' in the possession of Czechoslovakia, the GDR, and Bulgaria was explained by the fact that they were not equipped with nuclear warheads, and that their delivery to the armies concerned had taken place before 8 December 1987.⁵² The Minister of Defence, General Miroslav Vacek, declared in early April 1990 that the ČSLA had never possessed any nuclear munitions on Czechoslovak territory.⁵³ However, in his 1999 memoirs, he admitted to their possible storage in Czechoslovak territory by Soviet forces.⁵⁴

⁴⁸Article 4(e) of the Annex to Order of CSSR Minister of the Interior No. 9/1975 of 24 February 1975.

⁴⁹Article 3(c) of the Annex to Order of CSSR Minister of the Interior No. 39/1980 of 14 November 1980.

⁵⁰P. Žáček, *The Army under Scrutiny. Military Counterintelligence in Documents 1974–1989*, *Historie a vojenství* (History and Military Science) 52 (3–4) (2003), p. 803.

⁵¹*About Missiles in Czechoslovakia*, *Lidová demokracie* (People's Democracy) 46, (71) (24 March 1990), p. 2.

⁵²*Obrana lidu* (Defence of the People) 49 (65) (3 April 1990), p. 6.

⁵³(sl), *Without Nuclear Munitions*, *Rudé právo* (Red Justice) 70 (87) (12 April 1990), pp. 1–2.

⁵⁴M. Vacek, *Rozsoudí nás čas aneb Život není na povel*, (Prague: Erika 1999), p. 89.

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At that time, discussions about the storage of nuclear munitions in Czechoslovak territory became public. Due to the continuing culture of secrecy, it was only revealed later that there had been a treaty between the government of the CSFR and the government of the USSR covering the withdrawal of Soviet troops from the CSSR, and the withdrawal of the special forces from the Javor 50, 51 and 52 facilities had taken place on 26 February 1990. The three facilities were then taken over by the CSA between 2 and 30 June 1990. This was, in fact, part of a broader Soviet diplomatic effort, with Eduard Shevardnadze, the USSR Foreign Minister, using the occasion of the second CSCE Human Dimension Conference, held on 5-29 June 1990 in Copenhagen, to announce that the Soviet Union had unilaterally withdrawn its nuclear weapons from Central Europe.⁵⁵ On 30 October 1990, the Chiefs of the General Staffs of the USSR and CSA armed forces signed a protocol on returning the special facilities into the hands of the Czechoslovak Army. The document also contained an addendum stating that the 1986 treaty would be terminated.⁵⁶ As a result the facilities in Bělá pod Bezdězem and Bílina were handed over to the Federal Interior Ministry, and later on refugee camps were established there. The plan was for the FMO to take over the Míšov-Borovno facility for the provision of social and medical care for military personnel retiring from active duty, as well as for Second World War veterans.⁵⁷

In July 1991, the Minister of Defence of the CSFR, Luboš Dobrovský, sent a letter to the USSR Ministry of Defence requesting permission to declassify the texts of the two now-defunct treaties of 1965 and 1986. The Soviet party replied that the documents were still state secrets and that was not changed by the durations within the treaties having already expired. Moscow saw no reason to declassify them and make them available to the public. However, the Ministry of Defence of the CSFR persisted. On 5 September 1991, in the changed atmosphere following the attempted coup by conservative forces in the USSR (19–21 August), it again asked its Soviet partners for permission to declassify the two documents. This time the USSR Ministry of Defence partially conceded, stating that it was possible to make the contents of both treaties known to the leaders of the Defence and Security Committees of the CSFR FA.

⁵⁵F. Mezihorák, *Průvodce evropanstvím*, (Olomouc: Alda 1997), p. 80.

⁵⁶Prague ACD, Federal Assembly Collection, Period VI, File No. 17 of the Defence Security Committee, entry: Nuclear Weapons in the CSSR, Ref. No.: 08/242-46 of 14 November 1991, p. 5.

⁵⁷Prague ACD, Federal Assembly Collection, Period VI, File No. 17 of the Defence Security Committee, entry: Nuclear Weapons in the CSSR, Reply of Luboš Dobrovský, Minister of Defence of the CSFR, Reply to the Interpellation submitted by the Members of the Federal Assembly, Jégl, Lis & Soukup (Print 645), p. 2.

However, the contents were to remain classified as state secrets. Nobody on the Czechoslovak side was permitted to disseminate the two texts in any way.⁵⁸

Other expert state bodies also commented on the matter. On 28 April 1991, the chairman of the Defence and Security Committee of the FA, Ladislav Lis, asked the CSFR Government Committee for the Analysis of the Events of 1967–1970 for assistance in clarifying the issue of the storage of atomic warheads on Czechoslovak territory. On 8 May 1991, the scientific secretary of the Committee, Miloš Bárta, replied to the effect that no material had been found in the archive collections of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the KSČ indicating whether or not the Presidium had dealt with Operation JAVOR at all, or even if it had been informed of it.⁵⁹ That was true for both 1965 and 1986. It also confirmed the hypothetical considerations of that time that the storage of atomic warheads on Czechoslovak territory was decided by the Presidents of the Republic, Antonín Novotný, and after him, Gustáv Husák, as the highest military leaders of the country.⁶⁰

Nonetheless, a criminal liability might be triggered if the procedure for entering into the treaties of 1965 and 1986 had been in breach of constitutional principles, a decision of the President of the Republic, or rules laid down by the federal government for the negotiation of international treaties. The call for declaring criminal liability was most frequently made at the Meeting of the Defence and Security Committees on 16 April 1991. Members of Parliament in particular pointed to the fact that the Javor 50, 51 and 52 facilities had been de facto and de jure removed from Czechoslovak sovereignty and were subject to the power of a foreign country.⁶¹ Moreover, this was a matter with potentially profound implications for the lives and health of Czechoslovak citizens. However, in this respect, the contracting process in the case of the second treaty of 1986 was in accordance with the laws of that time. According to the decision of President Ludvík Svoboda of 24 March 1969, the question of the storage of nuclear munitions in the CSSR was considered to be a matter of a narrowly departmental nature under the responsibility of the Federal Minister of Defence.

⁵⁸Prague ACD, Federal Assembly Collection, Period VI, File No. 17 of the Defence Security Committee, entry: Nuclear Weapons in the CSSR, Ref. No.: 08/242-46 of 14 November 1991, p. 5.

⁵⁹ J. Belda, *Committee of the Government of the Czechoslovak Federal Republic for the Analysis of the Events of 1967–1970, Soudobé dějiny (Contemporary History) 1 (1) (1993), pp. 129–130.*

⁶⁰Prague ACD, Federal Assembly Collection, Period VI, File No. 17 of the Defence Security Committee, entry: Nuclear Weapons in the CSSR, Ref. No. 281/91 of 8 May 1991, signed by the Scientific Secretary of the Committee, Miloš Bárta.

⁶¹*The Javor Facilities Were Hiding Death*, Lidové noviny (People's Newspaper) 4 (90) (17 April 1991), p. 2.

Conclusion

Piecing together the facts, and given the fact that Czechoslovaks could not enter the heart of the Soviet controlled JAVOR facilities, can it be stated with absolute certainty that Soviet nuclear munitions were ever physically present on Czechoslovak territory?

The arguments can be summarised as follows.

Firstly, after the JAVOR facilities were taken over in 1990, CSA chemical warfare specialists carried out measurements using dosimetry instruments. The results of the measurements showed that no radioactive substances were present – the radiation situation was normal. This means that if nuclear munitions were ever stored at the JAVOR sites it can only be inferred indirectly.

Secondly, the JAVOR sites' special security classification, and the intense secrecy measures taken during their construction and use shows them to have been of 'special importance'.⁶²

Thirdly, the very good physical condition of the abandoned depots when first visited by Czechoslovak politicians, expert commissions, and journalists. This suggests that the facilities had been used for something of extreme importance to the Soviet party.

Fourthly, if no nuclear weapons were ever stored at the JAVOR sites it seems implausible that so much effort would have been put into negotiating treaties, imposing strict security arrangements, and operating the sites with Russian forces in civilian clothes. Even the knowledge of the treaty arrangements made between the USSR and Czechoslovakia was very restricted – and excluded senior members of the Czechoslovak administration of that time.

Fifthly, Warsaw Pact war plans assumed that Czechoslovak forces would deploy a large number of Soviet tactical nuclear weapons which would be supplied at relatively short notice. This implies that the weapons were stored at the JAVOR facilities under Soviet control.

The balance of probabilities is that a very large number of Soviet tactical nuclear weapons were stored in Czechoslovakia between 1965 and early 1990.

⁶²Prague ACD, Federal Assembly Collection, Period VI, File No. 17 of the Defence Security Committee, entry: Nuclear Weapons in the CSSR, Reply to the Interpellation of the Members of the Federal Assembly, p. 1.