

BETWEEN EXPERT KNOWLEDGE AND IDEOLOGY
The Stance of Czechoslovak Diplomacy
Towards Violations of Czechoslovak Airspace Between 1948 and 1968

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This study analyses the diplomatic activity of the Czechoslovak Communist Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the 1950s and 1960s in cases of military air incidents involving violations of Czechoslovak airspace or violations of the airspace of other states by Czechoslovak military aircraft. The author has compiled a collection of 85 air incidents for which extensive records exist in the archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The main diplomatic opponents of the Czechoslovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs in these incidents were the US diplomatic service and, to a lesser extent, the Federal Republic of Germany. The study primarily examines the position of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs within the communist power system in the process of responding to airspace violations and the extent of its decision-making powers. Furthermore, what was the nature of these decisions? Were they influenced more by political realism or ideology? What level of expertise did the officials involved in these cases possess? How did the ministry's diplomatic and press strategies differ? Methodologically, the study is based on the concept of "new diplomatic history" and the concept of expert knowledge and technocratic management in communist Czechoslovakia. The study analyses the most serious "profile" incidents, examines the question of cooperation between the individual actors of the power-political system in resolving them, and in the final part focuses on the factors that influenced the seriousness and manner of resolving individual incidents. The author concludes that, when it came to resolving military aviation incidents, Czechoslovak communist diplomacy displayed a considerable degree of political realism, due in part to the professional quality of the ministry's top officials.

Keywords: Cold War. Violations of Airspace. Czechoslovakia. 1948–1968. Diplomacy.

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Even at its most tense moments, the Cold War never escalated into direct military conflict between the two main political, power, and cultural blocs. This does not

mean, however, that military conflicts did not play an important part, but these were mainly large-scale (total or partial) proxy conflicts (Korea 1950–1953; Vietnam 1954/1964–1975; Afghanistan 1979–1989), demonstrations of military force on the brink of war (the Berlin crises of 1948–1949 and 1961, the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962). More or less serious daily provocations and minor conflicts also took place along the entire length of the Iron Curtain. Leaving aside, for the purposes of this study, the extensive catalogue of all possible clashes outside a purely military framework (shooting at “illegal” refugees from Czechoslovakia, attempts to leave the country through kidnappings, “kopečkáři”, smugglers, balloon operations, etc.), in communist Czechoslovakia, the most frequent incidents of this kind were mutual violations of the national territorial and air integrity.

It is precisely the violation of Czechoslovak airspace, and to some extent also the violation of foreign airspace by Czechoslovakia, that is the subject of this study. The primary research objective, however, is not to compile a complete list of all cases or describe them in detail from a tactical, technical, or even diplomatic point of view, but rather to attempt to analyse how these cases were dealt with over two decades by Czechoslovak diplomacy and its expert apparatus. In line with the trends of “*new diplomatic history*”¹, the study will focus on the position of the Czechoslovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the process of responding to airspace violations within the communist power system and the extent of its decision-making powers. Furthermore, what was the nature of these decisions? Were they influenced more by political realism or ideology? What was the position of those involved in these diplomatic cases? How did the diplomatic and press strategies of the ministry differ?

The second methodological starting point for this study was the concept of expert knowledge and technocratic management in communist Czechoslovakia. This has so far been applied mainly in the research of economic and social fields.²

No historian has yet systematically examined the diplomatic aspects of the violation of Czechoslovak airspace during the Cold War.³ On the other hand,

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- 1 For the purposes of this article, I am adopting the definition of *New Diplomatic History* [online], according to which new diplomatic history is characterised by “*the study of diplomacy as an extension of social interests, forces and environments.*”
 - 2 SOMMER et al. *Řídit socialismus jako firmu: technokratické vládnutí v Československu, 1956–1989*. Praha 2019; *Expertní kultury v socialistickém Československu*. In *Soudobé dějiny*, 2017, Vol. 24, no. 3; KOPEČEK et al. *Architekti dlouhé změny: expertní kořeny postsocialismu v Československu*. Praha 2019.
 - 3 The dramatic events surrounding the hijacking of civilian aircraft after 1948 are analysed in an inspiring monograph MICHÁLEK. *Za hranicou sloboda 1948 – 1953: (Dakoty „slobody“ a vlak do Selbu)*. Bratislava 2013.

there are a number of works, mostly by non-academic or regional researchers, on the purely military, tactical, technical, and combat aspects of these conflicts. The problem with the vast majority of these works is that they are not sufficiently well sourced.⁴ In this work, the author analyses a set of 85 air incidents for which there are extensive records in the archives of the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This does not mean that all airspace violations actually took place; it is likely that in certain cases, both sides did not hesitate to resort to fabricated accusations against their adversary in addition to denial. On the other hand, the actual number of violations of Czechoslovak airspace was probably much higher than the number mentioned.⁵ With the exception of one very serious case from 1963, the file contains mainly military incidents and does not include, for example, air strikes against balloons launched from West Germany.⁶

Most of the recorded air incidents affected the development of diplomatic relations with the United States. Czechoslovak–American relations therefore

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- 4 Some of the most comprehensive works are monographs by Miroslav Irra: IRRA. *Vysoká modrá zed' – ohlédnutí po letech. Protivzdušná obrana Československa v počátečním období studené války do roku 1961*. Praha 2019; IRRA. *Vysoká modrá zed' – ohlédnutí druhé. Protivzdušná obrana Československa v letech 1962–1980*. Praha 2020. Although they are undoubtedly based on carefully collected eyewitness accounts and the study of materials, these works lack references to sources. See here for a list of other, often apologetic, literature. Nevertheless, I decided not to carry out heuristics at the Central Military Archives – Military Historical Archive (MHA), given the research objectives of this work, for which the detailed course of individual incidents is irrelevant. I was surprised at how a dubious cult surrounding ČSLA pilots during the Cold War flourished on the book market after 1989. Between 2000 and 2008, the aviation aspect of the air incidents was explored in an exhibition at the Aviation Museum in Kbely entitled *The High Red Wall*.
 - 5 In 1951, Foreign Minister Viliam Široký argued against the Americans on the basis of 116 violations, without providing any further details. Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (hereinafter referred to as AMZV), fund (f.) Sekretariát ministra (Minister's Secretariat) – Tajné (Secret) (hereinafter referred to as SM – T) 1945 – 1963, Široký, box (b.) 9, file Briggs, V. Široký – E. Briggs, 21. 6. 51, translation, copy, without reference number (r. n.). In the last six months of 1954 alone, there were 11 violations of airspace by American jet aircraft, according to the Ministry of National Defence (hereinafter referred to as MNO) to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (hereinafter referred to as MZV), again without specifying these cases. AMZV, f. Teritoriální odbory (Territorial Departments) – Tajné (Secret) (hereinafter referred to as TO – T), 1955 – 1959, USA, b. 4, MNO – MZV, 30. 11. 1954, Secret, r. n. 411116/55. A record from the American Territorial Department from the early 1960s shows that although there had been “regular” violations “recently”, the MZV only took diplomatic action against some of them. AMZV, TO – T, 1960–1964, USA, b. 3, Informace o čs. – amerických stycích, 24. 1. 1961, r. n. 028636/61 – 6/1.
 - 6 The well-known leaflet balloon campaign, organised by American official and semi-governmental organisations linked to the CIA and the US government, took place in several phases between 1951 and 1956 (1951 Winds of Freedom; 1953 Prospero; 1954 – 1956 Veto). TO-MEK. *Balony svobody. Letákové operace Svobodné Evropy 1951–1956*. Praha 2014.

provide an important context for the events described. Few Western countries experienced such a fundamental and rapid deterioration in diplomatic relations with Czechoslovakia after 1948 as the USA. Shortly after the coup, both countries restricted consular services and diplomatic representation, and economic, financial, trade, scientific, and cultural exchanges remained unresolved for a long time and on a solely minimal basis. In the first half of the 1950s in particular, diplomats had very limited opportunities to interact with the environment in which they worked. A gradual normalisation of mutual relations finally took place in the 1960s, particularly in the field of cultural and scientific exchange.⁷

The Main Actors

The original post-war ideas about the structure of Czechoslovakia's airspace defence were limited by the post-war economic turmoil and the gradually growing domestic political crisis. Air defence was therefore developed on a very improvised basis, but the decisive blow to existing plans and ideas about its functioning was dealt by the communist coup in February 1948. The Czechoslovak army could no longer consider purchasing Western licences and was forced to work with captured military equipment and the acquisition of Soviet licences. On 17 April 1951, Czechoslovakia signed an agreement with the Soviet Union on the licensed production of the legendary MiG-15 aircraft, which became the backbone of the Czechoslovak fighter air force until 1957.⁸ The Czechoslovak army, whose officer corps had undergone several waves of purges after 1945 and 1948, was unable, either at the executive or managerial level, to meet the demands placed on it by the ruling Communist Party, especially after the outbreak of the Korean War. The greatest weakness of the system for securing the nation's airspace was its dual structure: air defence was provided by the State Air Defence (PLOSÚ, from 1954 PVOS) and the Air Force itself, only parts of which were operationally subordinate to PLOSÚ command. It was not until 1957 that a unified Air Force and State Air Defence Command was established.⁹

7 From the vast amount of literature available, I have selected the following monographs: FAURE. *Americký přítel: Československo ve hře americké diplomacie 1943–1968*. Praha 2006; KOVRIG. *Of Walls and Bridges. The United States and Eastern Europe*. New York; London 1991; MICHÁLEK. *Nádeje a vytriezvenia: (československo-americké hospodárske vzťahy v rokoch 1945 – 1951)*. Bratislava 1995; MICHÁLEK. *Prípád Oatis: československý komunistický režim verus dopisovateľ Associated Press*. Bratislava 2005; MICHÁLEK. *Rok 1968 a Československo: postoj USA, Západu a OSN*. Bratislava 2008; NEČASOVÁ. *Obrazy nepřítel v Československu 1948–1956*. Praha 2020; TRHLÍK. *Spojené státy a Československo: vzťahy v letech 1918–1988*. Praha 1988.

8 IRRA, *Vysoká, ohlédnutí po letech*, p. 16.

9 IRRA, *Vysoká, ohlédnutí po letech*, pp. 27-31, 81. For basic trends in the development of the

Military counterintelligence, another element of the power system that influenced the resolution of air incidents, underwent frequent organisational changes. On 1 April 1951, the Military Counterintelligence Service Headquarters was established within the Ministry of National Security (hereinafter as MNB), which was reorganised on 1 July 1952 into the Main Military Counterintelligence Administration. After the MNB was dissolved in October 1953, military counterintelligence became part of the Ministry of the Interior as a separate administration. From 1951 to 1953, its chief was Lt. Col. František Chalupa.¹⁰

The organisational and personnel destruction of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs after 1948 and its development in the 1960s were analysed in detail by Jindřich Dejmek in one of his fundamental monographs.¹¹ Dejmek distinguishes several key phases: the slower onset of purges under Vladimír Clementis (1948–1950), the severe destruction of the diplomatic and ministerial apparatus in 1950–1953 (when the ministry was headed by Viliam Široký), and the restoration of the ministerial apparatus and a partial return to professional standards in 1953–1959 and even more so in the 1960s (Václav David was foreign minister for many years, from 1953 to 1968).

The Czechoslovak American-British 5th Territorial Department (from 1957 the 6th American-British/American Territorial Department) played an extremely important role in resolving individual incidents at the ministry. The department was gradually led by Ján Pudlák (1952–1957), Vladimír Pavlíček (1957–1959), Karel Petrželka (1959–1962), and Richard Ježek (1962–1969).¹² Although they were communist cadres, they all received a high-quality legal education. Ježek and Petrželka obtained their degrees before February 1948, and Pudlák graduated in 1948.¹³ The head of the legal department, JUDr. František Vavříčka (1950–1955), JUDr. Zdeněk Trhlík (1956–1957) and Pavol Winkler (1958–1964) were

Czechoslovak army, see BÍLEK; LÁNÍK and ŠACH. *Československá armáda v prvním poválečném desetiletí. Květen 1945 – květen 1955*. Praha 2006; BÍLEK; LÁNÍK; MINAŘÍK; POVOLNÝ and ŠACH. *Československá lidová armáda v koaličních vazbách Varšavské smlouvy. Květen 1955 – srpen 1968*. Praha 2008.

- 10 POVOLNÝ. *Organizační vývoj VKR v rámci ministerstva národní bezpečnosti od dubna 1951 do června 1952*. In *České, slovenské a československé dějiny 20. století. 2, sborník z mezinárodní konference mladých vědeckých pracovníků. Univerzita Hradec Králové, 7. – 8. března 2007*. Ústí nad Orlicí 2007, pp. 215-221; POVOLNÝ. VKR na přechodu a ústupu 1953–1955. In *Od svobody k nesvobodě 1945–1956*. Praha 2011, pp. 138-147; ŽÁČEK. Armáda pod drobnohledem: vojenská kontrarozvědka v dokumentech, 1974–1989. In *Historie a vojenství*, 2003, Vol. 52, no. 3-4, pp. 797-836.
- 11 DEJMEK. *Diplomacie Československa. Vol. I. Nástin dějin ministerstva zahraničních věcí a diplomacie (1918–1992)*. Praha 2012, pp. 145-195.
- 12 DEJMEK, *Diplomacie*, p. 264.
- 13 See scanned biographies DEJMEK. *Diplomacie Československa. Vol. I. Biografický slovník československých diplomatů (1918 – 1992)*. Praha 2013 [online 7. 9. 2025].

also from a similar background.¹⁴ Until her forced departure from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1957, Deputy Minister JUDr. Gertruda Sekaninová-Čákrťová usually had the final say in resolving aviation incidents with Western countries.¹⁵

Notable Incidents

Among the entire series of air incidents, the most serious were those involving actual air combat or the capture of pilots for various reasons. It is particularly important to note, however, that such cases not only attracted the attention of the communist power apparatus, but also opened up a wide field for diplomatic, ideological, and media clashes both at home and abroad. At least a brief description of these cases is necessary for the further analytical part of this study.

Thunderjets in Kbely. On 10 June 1951, the American Embassy asked the Ministry of Foreign Affairs if it knew anything about the fate of two American F-84E Thunderjet aircraft that had failed to return to the American zone on 8 June from their regular training flight. The Czechoslovak side remained silent even after the American urgings the following day, when the Americans already knew that both pilots had landed in Kbely. The Czechoslovak Military Counterintelligence Service Headquarters had already been interrogating the pilots of both aircraft for three days, however, who had been forced to land near Prague due to a navigation error.¹⁶ On 12 June, Deputy Minister Sekaninová received First Counsellor Llewellyn E. Thompson, but only told him that the whole matter was under investigation.¹⁷

Three days later (on 15 June 1951), US Ambassador Ellis O. Briggs visited Foreign Minister Viliam Široký in the afternoon.¹⁸ He urgently asked the minister about the fate of the two pilots. Široký told him that the pilots were in good health and that “*the matter was under investigation*”. The ambassador assured

14 Ibid.

15 KOPEČEK. *Gertruda Sekaninová-Čákrťová: Biografie osobnosti čs. veřejného života*. Diploma Thesis FF UK. Praha 2013, pp. 59-92. A conciliatory biography of this exceptional woman with a dramatic and turbulent life story, a personality who underwent a complex development from a fervent Stalinist to a courageous opponent of the August occupation 1968 and a brave dissident.

16 Both pilots, American Luther George Roland and Norwegian Björn Johansen, took off on the morning of 8 June from the base of the American 526th Fighter Squadron in Giebelstadt. The mission's objective was to train Johansen in formation flying. However, they lost radio contact with the Nuremberg navigation station and, having lost their bearings, were forced to land at the first airport they saw due to low fuel reserves. Five or seven minutes had passed since their second border violation at 10:36 a.m. This information gives a good idea of how the “small” size of Czechoslovakia complicated matters for both sides during these incidents.

17 AMZV, f. SM – T, 1945–1963, Široký, b. 9, file Briggs, *Záznam pro s. ministra*, without r. n.

18 Ellis Ormsbee Briggs (1899–1976) was the American ambassador to Czechoslovakia from 1949 to 1952.

the minister that the overflight was due to loss of orientation and expressed his regret over the whole matter; he demanded the immediate release of both detainees. Široký, on the other hand, explained that, given the increasing number of overflights and the fact that the aircraft were carrying live ammunition, it was necessary to “investigate whether the overflight was accidental or intentional”.¹⁹ The American correspondence of 17 June also expressed regret over the incident and emphasised that the Americans were making every effort to prevent airspace violations. At the same time, however, in accordance with international law, the American side demanded the immediate return of both pilots and aircraft. Široký responded to this note on 21 June, stating that, in view of the systematic violation of Czechoslovak airspace by American aircraft, the government must investigate this latest incident “with particular care”.²⁰ The exchange of correspondence culminated in a US message dated 24 June 1951 to Minister Široký, stating that an unintentional off-course could not be considered a “flagrant violation of the most fundamental principles of international law” and that “the United States government does not recognise the right of Czechoslovakia to continue to detain the two jet pilots...”.²¹

An uninformed observer would have expected both sides to stand firm in their positions. Unexpectedly, however, the incident was resolved relatively smoothly: the Foreign Ministry informed the American Embassy that the American pilot would be returned to the American occupation zone in Germany, while the Norwegian would be sent to Norway on a civilian flight at his own request.²² Lieutenant Roland was repatriated on 4 July 1951 (US Independence Day!) at the border crossing in Rozvadov, and Lieutenant Johansen flew to Norway on the same day. The following day, both aircraft were handed over. It appears that the Czechoslovak side had already examined both aircraft in sufficient detail, could not learn anything more from the statements of the two pilots, and had already exhausted all diplomatic options.²³

19 AMZV, f. SM – T, 1945–1963, Široký, b. 9, file Briggs, *Záznam z návštěvy amerického velvyslance Briggse u s. ministra dne 15. 6. 1951*, without r. n.; report Briggs: Briggs – Secretary of State, 16. 6. 1951. In SLANY et al., eds. *Foreign Relations of the United States 1951. Europe: Political and Economic Developments*. Volume IV, Part 2, Nr. 684. United States Government Printing Office 1985 [online 7. 9. 2025].

20 AMZV, f. SM – T, 1945–1963, Široký, b. 9, file Briggs, note from 17. 6. 1951, translation, no r. n.; V. Široký – E. Briggs, 21. 6. 51, translation, no r. n.

21 AMZV, f. SM – T, 1945–1963, Široký, b. 9, file Briggs, E. Briggs – Minister of Foreign Affairs, 24. 6. 1951, translation, copy, no r. n.

22 Response from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the note of 24 June 1951, typescript, draft, no r. n.

23 AMZV, f. SM – T, 1945–1963, Široký, b. 9, file Briggs, Františka Chalupa’s Report, 10. 7. 1951, no r. n. A genealogical web record on Luther Roland states that the intervention of

The first Czechoslovak shoot-down of the Cold War. The Korean War had already demonstrated that the F-84 Thunderjets were in many ways no match for the new MiG-15. On 10 March 1953, American pilot Warren G. A. Brown from the 36th Fighter-Bomber Wing based in Fürstenfeldbruck also became aware of the qualities of the MiG-15. On that fateful day, he took off with a second aircraft piloted by Donald C. Smith on a patrol flight along the border. At 11 a.m., the two Americans encountered the MiGs flown by Lieutenant Jaroslav Šrámek and Lieutenant Milan Forst. Upon detecting the enemy aircraft, both American pilots turned and attempted to escape. According to Šrámek's own testimony, he opened fire without warning on the retreating aircraft and damaged one of them. Šrámek continued the pursuit and a few minutes later hit Brown's aircraft again. As a result, it crashed near the village of Falkenstein near Regensburg, and the pilot saved himself by ejecting. Regardless of the military and diplomatic claims of both sides, it is highly likely that both Americans were in Czechoslovak airspace at the time of the first contact, but at the moment of the shoot-down, they were probably flying in the Federal Republic of Germany. At the same time, it is likely that Šrámek, the pursuer, was already fighting outside the border of Czechoslovakia.²⁴

The momentary location of the aircraft was crucial for assessing the entire conflict, not only in terms of Czechoslovak-American relations, but also in the context of global public opinion. A diplomatic battle ensued in which both sides rapidly descended into deceit: The day after the incident, US Ambassador George Wadsworth²⁵ protested "*in the strongest terms*" against the violation of the American zone in Germany and the attack on two American aircraft, while the CS Foreign Ministry's note accused the Americans of a "*gross violation*" of Czechoslovak airspace and stated that the American side bore full responsibility for the incident. Czechoslovakia therefore rejected the American note "*in the strongest possible terms*".²⁶ As both sides continued to stand their ground, the American side requested in a note dated 29 July 1953 that the Czechoslovak side substantiate its claims by submitting to the Americans radar records, radio operators' logs and detailed information about the air incident itself. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs came to the legal conclusion that the American side

President Harry Truman and Secretary of State Dean Acheson contributed to his release, but I have not found any evidence of this in the Foreign Ministry materials.

24 IRRA, *Vysoká, ohlédnutí po letech*, pp. 51-60. This is also confirmed by oral communication from aviation historian Jiří Rajlich, whom I would like to thank for his consultation.

25 George Wadsworth II (1893–1958) was a career diplomat, Middle East expert, and ambassador to Czechoslovakia from 1952 to 1953.

26 AMZV, f. TO – T, 1955–1959, USA, b. 4, r. n. 109501/53/ABO, Note of the US Embassy 11. 3. 1953; *ibid*, Note MZV 11. 3. 1953.

had no right to request Czechoslovak evidence, as it claimed that the shooting down had taken place over its zone; the burden of proof therefore lay with the American side, and the scope of the documents requested went far beyond the usual range.²⁷ The Czechoslovak side therefore did not intend to respond further to the American request.²⁸

In its note of 18 August 1954, the American side again described the course of the entire incident from its point of view. It used an even harsher and more forceful tone than in previous notes: it now demanded financial compensation of \$271,000 for illegal and deliberate violence against the USA. If Czechoslovakia was not willing to compensate for the damage, the US intended to refer the matter to the International Court of Justice in The Hague.²⁹ However, Czechoslovak (and undoubtedly also American) diplomats were well aware that both parties had to agree to a dispute being heard before the International Court of Justice.³⁰ The US had already dealt with a similar case in the past in the same way, by filing a lawsuit in an international forum – the capture of the American crew of a C-47 over Hungary in 1951.³¹ Before the government could issue a statement on the matter, the US filed a lawsuit with the International Court of Justice on 29 March 1955.³² On 6 May 1955, the Czechoslovak ambassador in The Hague handed a letter to the Secretary of the International Court of Justice in which the government expressed its explicit disagreement with the proceedings. As a result, less than a year later, the International Court of Justice removed the lawsuit from its list of cases.³³

Shooting at Skyraiders. On 12 March 1954, two American Skyraider combat aircraft (AD-4 and AD-4N, pilots H. L. Patten and R. B. Ward) took off from

27 AMZV, f. TO – T, 1955–1959, USA, b. 4, r. n. 129604/53, Note of the US Embassy 29. 7. 1953 and attached statement.

28 AMZV, f. TO – T, 1955–1959, USA, b. 4, r. n. 171/478/54-ABO/1, Note 25. 2. 1954.

29 “*The United States Government is compelled to conclude, and it charges, that the foregoing actions of the Czechoslovak Government,... were deliberately and unlawfully committed with the ulterior malicious intent to cause grievous injury to the United States Government and to the American people...*” AMZV, f. TO – T, 1955–1959, USA, b. 4, čj. 416575/54, Note 18. 8. 1954.

30 AMZV, f. TO – T, 1955–1959, USA, b. 4, r. n. 412091/55.

31 *Print Treatment in Hungary of Aircraft and Crew of United States of America (United States of America v. Hungarian Peoples’s Republic; United States of America v. Union of Soviet Socialist Republics)*, 12. 7. 1954 [online 7. 9. 2025].

32 AMZV, f. TO – T, 1955–1959, USA, b. 4, r. n. 414621/55-ABO/1; 111548/55; 414622/55-ABO/1.

33 “*Le Gouvernement Tchecoslovaque ne voit pas la raison pour laquelle ce cas devrait être examiné acceptable la requête des Etats-Unis introduisant une telle instance devant la Cour Internationale de Justice.*” AMZV, f. TO – T, 1955–1959, USA, b. 4, r. n. 416047/55-ABO/1; *ibid*, r. n. 114207/56-ABO/1.

the aircraft carrier USS Randolph in the Mediterranean Sea with the objective of simulating a training attack on an airport in the GDR. After they entered Czechoslovak airspace, they were intercepted by Lt. Zdeněk Voleman from the 5th Fighter Regiment. As both aircraft were already approaching the state border, Voleman was given permission to fire. He evidently did not know what type of aircraft he had encountered or how successful the attack was. According to American documentation used by Miroslav Irra in his book, one of the aircraft was hit in the tail and damaged but was not shot down.³⁴

In the diplomatic dispute that followed, both sides somewhat modified their accounts of the entire combat incident. Although the Americans did not deny that their aircraft had violated Czechoslovak airspace, they justified their presence in a manner fundamentally different from the actual mission objective: According to a statement by William Campbell Chambliss, an officer for external communications at the US Naval Command for the Eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean,³⁵ it was a mere training navigation flight, and both aircraft were unarmed and could only return fire “with a slingshot”.³⁶ However, a Czechoslovak note delivered in Washington on 12 March falsely claimed that the Americans had disobeyed the order to follow and that “the Czechoslovak pilot was forced to use his weapons in self-defence.”³⁷ The CS Prime Minister, the President and the Minister of National Defence were informed of the incident. The two sides exchanged two more diplomatic notes without backing down from their positions, and the case was thus closed relatively quickly.³⁸

Mig aircraft over the Federal Republic of Germany. There were also violations of foreign airspace on the Czechoslovak side. As far as the author can ascertain, the Czechoslovak cases were mostly caused by faulty flight instruments and ground control, as well as inexperienced pilots. At this point, only a few examples from the 1950s will be mentioned, as a complete list would not be very useful for the purposes of this article. For example, in 1952 alone, two unspecified aircraft did so in the Mariánské Lázně area on 4 March; three months later, on 4 June, two more MiG-15s lost their bearings.³⁹ In some cases, including the two mentioned above, the Czechoslovak side (but often also the American side)

34 IRRA, *Vysoká, ohlédnutí po letech*, pp. 63-66.

35 Its classification and correct name: *Captain William Campbell Chambliss*. NAVY – Office of Information, Biographies Branch, 9. 4. 1959 [online 7. 9. 2025].

36 AMZV, f. TO – T, 1945–1954, USA, b. 14, r. n. 173011/54.

37 AMZV, f. TO – T, 1945–1954, USA, b. 14, r. n. 108046/54-ABO.

38 AMZV, f. TO – T, 1945–1954, USA, b. 14, US Note from 24. 3. 1954, r. n. 173062/54; Czechoslovak Note 22. 4. 1954, r. n. 410260/ABO-1/54.

39 AMZV, f. TO – T, 1945–1954, USA, b. 22, *Diplomatická korespondence mezi ČSR a USA. Rok 1952*. MZV, printed, secret. See also IRRA, *Vysoká, ohlédnutí po letech*, p. 50.

acknowledged the mistake, while in other cases Czechoslovakia insisted that no border violation had taken place. Such inconsistency was caused by the specific diplomatic and political situation in which both countries found themselves at the time, as well as their current political and ideological intentions, but also by the degree of verifiability of the incident. In addition, pilots were reluctant to admit to border violations, at least if they were unintentional.⁴⁰ For example, based on information from the CS Ministry of National Defence, Czechoslovakia rejected the American claim that on 17 May 1954 a MiG-15 violated the border near Schafberg.⁴¹ In 1955, on the other hand, the Czechoslovak authorities admitted the mistake made by a MiG-15 pilot on 9 September 1955 as a result of “*loss of spatial orientation*” and apologised for it. However, this was mainly because the pilot was in direct contact with two F-86 Sabres during the incident and it was therefore almost impossible to deny.⁴² In 1958, the United States protested on behalf of the German government against the Czechoslovak violation of the airspace of the Federal Republic of Germany on 31 July, but Czechoslovakia denied this violation and accused the Americans of “blocking” the border with F-100 Super Sabre aircraft.⁴³ Czechoslovakia reacted similarly to American accusations of a flyover on 16 September 1961, which, according to Irra, was proven to have occurred as a result of pilot error.⁴⁴

FRG: capture of German pilots and an unfortunate amateur. On 22 October 1959, pilots Helmuth Kraus and Rolf Georg Hofman from the 34th Allgäu fighter-bomber squadron took off from a base near Memmingen on a training flight in two American-made F-84 F Thunderstreak aircraft. Due to adverse weather conditions, technical problems and a navigation error, pilot Kraus struck the treetops during a repeated incursion into Czechoslovak airspace near the Dyleň hill near Mariánské Lázně and was forced to eject. His wingman, pilot Rolf Hofman, saw the explosion and ejected shortly afterwards. Both pilots were detained, imprisoned and interrogated, and offered emigration. It was not until 3 December 1959 that both pilots were handed over to the Federal Republic of Germany.⁴⁵

40 “*We flew over the forests of Šumava and raced as fast as we could to Bohemia. ... We made it through the flight and it was clear that we would never talk about it to anyone,*” recalls pilot Milan Forst. Quote according to IRRA, *Vysoká, ohlédnutí po letech*, p. 68.

41 AMZV, f. TO – T, 1945–1954, USA, b. 14, r. n. 412030/54; 412030/54-ABO/1; 17125/54-ABO/1; 412861/54-ABO/1; IRRA, *Vysoká, ohlédnutí po letech*, p. 67.

42 AMZV, f. TO – T, 1945–1954, USA, b. 14, r. n. 422572/55; IRRA, *Vysoká, ohlédnutí po letech*, pp. 73-74.

43 AMZV, f. TO – T, 1955–1959, USA, b. 3, r. n. 0207396; 020739.

44 AMZV, f. TO – T, 1960–1964, USA, b. 3, r. n. 122828, *Údajné porušení prostoru NSR čs. Letadly*; IRRA, *Vysoká, ohlédnutí po letech*, p. 113.

45 IRRA, *Vysoká, ohlédnutí po letech*, pp. 106-109. The date 3 December is given by the amateur

This was a serious incident, about which Antonín Novotný was regularly informed. In the initial phase (until 14 November), the Czechoslovak side even refused to provide the Federal Republic with any information about the accident “for reasons that were considered serious”. However, the German side’s reaction was very conciliatory, even humble. It apologised for the whole incident in a note dated 21 November 1959, and after the release of both pilots, the Federal Republic assured in another note dated 17 December that it would take all steps to prevent similar incidents from recurring. The German government excused the alleged aggressiveness of the German press by pointing out that the public had long been unaware of the fate of the pilots; it also agreed to reimburse the Czechoslovak side for costs amounting to CZK 235,355.⁴⁶

Three years later, on 3 October 1963, Aeroklub Bruck sports pilot George Nusser violated Czechoslovak airspace with his Cessna during what was apparently his first flight, as a result of losing his bearings. It was precisely the pilot’s immaturity and inexperience that explain why he did not respond to the order to follow or to the warning shots fired by the pilot of the intervening MiG-19, Jan Foks. The MiG pilot was therefore “ordered by the Chief of Staff of the 7th Army Air Defence, Lt. Col. Josef Maušák, who was present at the command post of the 3rd Air Defence Corps, to destroy the intruder aircraft. The aircraft was shot down by MiG cannons and crashed near Tachov.” The German side was informed by order of the Minister of National Defence that the aircraft had crashed and the pilot was dead; his body was later handed over.⁴⁷

New times, new problems. From the late 1950s, the Czechoslovak air defence was preoccupied with new forms of testing its response: these included “provocative flights” against the Czechoslovak border⁴⁸ and “provocative guidance” of fighter aircraft against civilian airlines of Czechoslovak Airlines.⁴⁹

website Letecká badatelna (Aviation Research), *Kopec Dyleň u Mar. Lázní okr. Cheb*, 22. 10. 1959 [online 7. 9. 2025]; Irra gives 2 December, but the context suggests that this may have been the date of release, not the exchange.

46 National Archive (NA), f. KSČ-ÚV-Antonín Novotný (AN) II, b. 150, *Protestní nóty k leteckým incidentům mezi ČSSR a NSR – narušení hranic letadly NSR*. The Federal Government communicated with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs through the American Embassy.

47 NA, f. KSČ-ÚV-AN II, b. 150, *Protestní nóty k leteckým incidentům mezi ČSSR a NSR – narušení hranic letadly NSR; IRRA, Vysoká modrá zeď – ohlédnutí druhé. Protivzdušná obrana Československa v letech 1962–1980*. Nevojice 2020, pp. 20–21.

48 The Czechoslovak note protested against such “systematic provocative and hostile actions” on 13 September, 6 October and 26 October 1961 on 20. 12. 1961. AMZV, f. TO – T, 1960–1964, USA, b. 3, r. n. 130085/61, sub 122828/61, copy.

49 AMZV, f. TO – T, 1960–1964, USA, b. 3, First Deputy Minister of National Defence, Lt. Gen. Otakar Rytíř – Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Jiří Hájek, *Provokační navádění stihacích letounů na čs. dopravní letouny*, r. n. 021431/60.

The presence of aircraft capable of carrying nuclear weapons near the border also provoked protests.⁵⁰ A fundamentally new element in the whole issue of airspace violations was the frequent use of helicopters by the American side, which were more difficult to detect and difficult for fighter jets to reach.⁵¹ This was undoubtedly linked to the new US combat doctrine, which envisaged the use of helicopters for reconnaissance, transport and combat purposes, both as a result of lessons learned from the Korean War and, in particular, in the context of the US's growing involvement in Vietnam.

Relations and cooperation between actors during the resolution of incidents

First of all, it should be said that the KSČ, or rather its Central Committee, did not intervene too directly in the process of resolving incidents and maintained its position of power primarily by ensuring that diplomatic procedures were subject to its approval, although this was not always the case.⁵² Consultations with the Prime Minister were apparently more frequent.⁵³

Especially in the first half of the 1950s, there were noticeable cracks and shortcomings in the cooperation between the main actors involved in resolving air incidents – the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of the Interior, or the Ministry of National Security.

The Ministry of National Defence was naturally the body at the forefront of the information flow in most cases involving air incidents. Its remit included air defence and fighter aviation. After receiving information about an incident from the armed forces, the Ministry of National Defence contacted and informed the

50 AMZV, f. TO – T, 1955–1959, USA, b. 3, Letters to Prime Minister V. Široký, Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia J. Hendrych, and President A. Novotný dated 3 December 1958, copies. Attached is a draft note protesting the violation of airspace on 2 December 1958 by two jet aircraft while a heavy American bomber was patrolling near the border: *“It is a well-known fact, confirmed by officials of the American government and the American Air Force, that American military aircraft operating over the territory of West Germany and other member states of the North Atlantic Treaty often carry atomic and hydrogen bombs on board.”*

51 These were a violations 24. 2. and 11. 3. 1959, 10. 7. 1961, 6. 9. 1967, 7. 9. 1967, 11. 5. 1968 of the sample under investigation.

52 This was the case, for example, of the incidents 2. 12. 1958 (AMZV, f. TO – T, 1955 – 1959, USA, b. 3, r. n. 024929/58, *Narušení čs. vzdušného prostoru americkými letadly*); 31. 12. 1958 (AMZV, f. TO – T, 1955 – 1959, USA, b. 3, r. n. 016199); 22. 10. 1959 and 3. 10. 1963 (NA, f. KSČ-ÚV-AN II, b. 150, *Protestní nóty k leteckým incidentům mezi ČSSR a NSR – narušení hranic letadly NSR*).

53 Incidents of the 10. 3. 1953 (AMZV, f. TO – T, 1955–1959, USA, b. 4, r. n. 109501 a 414622/55-ABO/1); 9. 11. 1956 (AMZV, f. TO – T, 1955–1959, USA, b. 4, r. n. 145116/56); 17. 7. 1957 (AMZV, f. TO – T, 1960–1964, USA, b. 3, r. n. 017572/57); draft note on incidents from the first half of 1956 (AMZV, f. TO – T, 1960–1964, USA, b. 3, r. n. 129968/56-ABO/1).

Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In some cases, this information included an explicit request for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to take diplomatic action against the country responsible for the violation.⁵⁴

However, the first prerequisite for successful diplomatic intervention was that the Czechoslovak side be able to substantiate its claims. Czechoslovak radar technology in the 1950s was unable to guarantee this; even the pilots themselves could only estimate their position approximately. Both the pilots and their superiors therefore knew that they were simply unable to determine and substantiate the exact position of the aircraft during the incidents. Reports of the incident and reconstructions of flight paths were therefore highly inaccurate, if not completely fabricated in some cases: “...all the drawings we came up with in Prague are really just biased, ... constantly corrected according to the requirements of Mrs. Čákrtová-Sekaninová...”, Milan Forst described to Miroslav Irra in 1999 how the Czechoslovak side compiled the documentation on the shooting down of the F-84 on 10 March 1953.⁵⁵ However, the Ministry could not openly admit that the army and the Ministry of Defence were often unable to provide quality documentation. Moreover, it must have been strange for soldiers that the Foreign Ministry staff did not understand this. Especially in cases where the Ministry of Defence felt that things could have happened differently, it did not communicate or communicated only after being urged to do so; in layman’s terms, it played dead. For example, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs urged the Ministry of Defence on 18 October and then again on 27 November 1954 to respond to the key American note of 18 August 1954, which concerned the shooting down of an F-84 in 1953.⁵⁶ The Ministry of Defence did not respond even after three months. The Ministry of the Interior did respond, but with the reservation that the protection of airspace was not within its competence.⁵⁷ In autumn 1958, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs complained that the Ministry of National Defence was informing it with considerable delay, that the information was often inaccurate and vague, and that it was not possible to identify the aircraft

54 Incident 9. 11. 1956 (AMZV, f. TO – T, 1955–1959, USA, b. 3, Minister of National Defence B. Lomský – Minister of Foreign Affairs V. David, 10. 11. 1956, r. n. 017629/56); incident 5. 8. 1958 (AMZV, f. TO – T, 1955 – 1959, USA, b. 3, r. n. 111998/58); incident 7. 3. 1957 (AMZV, f. TO – T, 1955–1959, USA, b. 3, r. n. 013620/58-6/1).

55 IRRA, *Vysoká, ohlédnutí po letech*, p. 59.

56 See note 29.

57 AMZV, f. TO – T, 1955–1959, USA, b. 4, r. n. 419263/54. Furthermore, for example: Despite urgent requests, the Ministry of Defence did not participate in the preparation of a response to the American note of 8 February 1954; also in the case of the resolution of the incident of 17 May 1954, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs complained about the lax approach of the Ministry of Defence (AMZV, f. TO – T, 1945–1954, USA, b. 14, r. n. 412084/54-ABO/1, record of 25 May 1954).

precisely; in three cases, the incursions were shallow and therefore difficult to prove due to the inaccuracy of the reporting and radar services.⁵⁸

From the 1960s onwards, cooperation between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of National Defence visibly improved. In its reports, the Ministry of National Defence also assessed the seriousness of the violations and estimated whether they were intentional.⁵⁹

What influenced the severity of the incident?

A comparison of diplomatic responses to the incidents reveals that in many comparable cases the reactions varied greatly. There are a number of factors that influenced the severity of an incident.

1. ***The objective severity of the incident.*** This undoubtedly includes incidents involving shooting (or even shooting down), the capture of a pilot or pilot and aircraft. These had the potential to escalate, were of interest to the press and the public, and therefore became the subject of serious diplomatic entanglements.
2. ***The question of the adversary.*** Even in this specific issue of air incidents, Czechoslovak diplomatic activity clearly showed that communist Czechoslovakia considered the United States to be its main adversary in the Cold War. For example, in the case of the return of Norwegian pilot Björn Johansen, the language of Czechoslovak diplomacy was noticeably more accommodating than in the case of Luther Roland. Moreover, Czechoslovakia somewhat slyly complied with the Norwegian's wish not to be returned to the American authorities in the Federal Republic, but to Norway.⁶⁰ As far as the Federal Republic of Germany is concerned, the German side's completely non-conflictual and non-confrontational approach (in the case of the capture of two German pilots on 22 October 1959) may come as a surprise. On the contrary, the shamelessness with which the air force destroyed the life of an amateur German pilot in 1963, without Czechoslovakia worrying about the diplomatic consequences, is shocking.⁶¹ Even in the case of the captured Italian military pilot Ernesto di Maio, who lost his sense of direction on 12 October 1959 and

58 AMZV, f. TO – T, 1960–1964, USA, b. 3, r. n. 021905/58-6/1, record of 3. 10. 1958.

59 AMZV, TO – T, 1960 – 1964, USA, b. 3, r. n. 026748/60; MZV, TO – T, 1965–1969, USA, b. 4, r. n. 026419/67, 109 775/68.

60 See documents in AMZV, f. SM – T, 1945–1963, Široký, b. 9, file Briggs, *Pristanie dvoch tryskových letadiel*.

61 Both cases are described above.

was forced to land at the airport in Hradec Králové, the Czechoslovak diplomacy did not act in an extremely confrontational manner.⁶²

3. ***The question of timing.*** The materials studied clearly show that most incidents during the 1950s, the most tense period of the Cold War, until the arrival of the Kennedy administration in January 1961, were attributed greater significance than was the case during the 1960s. According to information from the Czechoslovak side, after the new American president took office, training exercises on the western border were suspended for about six months and there was also a noticeable effort to “...more consistently refrain from violating Czechoslovak territorial sovereignty.”⁶³ During the 1960s, most of the notes, both in terms of content and language, were much more formal and less heated than in the previous decade.⁶⁴ Another important factor was probably that diplomats were no longer as personally involved in these incidents as Gertruda Čákrtová-Sekaninová had been. Despite her rational legal education, she reacted to all air incidents very emotionally and uncompromisingly, calling staff to respond even during the night.⁶⁵
4. ***Applicability in diplomatic disputes.*** The analysed set of incidents shows that, especially in cases where one of the parties felt that the facts and circumstances were in its favour, it tried to make the most of it. On 15 June 1951, the aforementioned meeting between US Ambassador Briggs and Minister Široký took place regarding the detained pilots. In his report to Secretary of State Dean Acheson, Briggs complained that he had been reduced to the role of petitioner and that Minister Široký had “took full advantage of his opportunity”: “Meeting lasted two hours and FonMin apparently enjoyed every minute of it.”⁶⁶ In connection with the diplomatic proceedings concerning the captured German pilots at the end of 1959, Foreign Minister Václav David praised how the Czechoslovak approach (both diplomatic and propaganda) in the whole affair had put the Bonn government in an awkward position.⁶⁷

62 *Rudé Právo* (hereinafter RP), 31 October 1959, Vol. 39, no. 301, p. 1, *Přistání italského vojenského letadla v ČSR*. However, Di Maio was not released until the end of October, until which time he was interrogated by the state security service. IRRA, *Výsoká, ohlédnutí po letech*, pp. 104-106.

63 AMZV, f. TO – T, 1960–1964, USA, b. 3, Informace o čs. – amerických stycích, 24. 1. 1961, čj. 028636/61-6/1.

64 AMZV, f. TO – T, 1960–1964, USA, b. 3; MZV, f. TO – T, 1965–1969, USA, b. 4.

65 Undated oral statement by Vlasta Vetterová (secretary to G. Čákrtová-Sekaninová in the first half of the 1950s) to the author in the 1990s.

66 SLANY et al., eds. *Foreign Relations*, Nr. 684 [online 7. 9. 2025].

67 NA, f. KSC-ÚV-AN II, b. 150, *Protestní nóty*, V. David – A. Novotný, 11. 1. 1960, r. n. 23-

The Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia created a tricky diplomatic situation for Czechoslovak diplomats. Its air force took over five Thunderjets from the Americans in 1957, and when they were flying from Belgium to Yugoslavia on 27 July 1957, the planes lost their bearings and ended up over the territory of the republic. Pilot Vladimír Voráček took off against two of these aircraft and recalled that they were not marked with any insignia, which may explain why he did not receive orders to fire.⁶⁸ However, Czechoslovak diplomats attributed the overflight to the Americans and reported the incident and the subsequent Czechoslovak protest note of 29 July in the press.⁶⁹ The mistake was explained by the American Embassy on 13 August, followed by an apology from Yugoslavia on 14 August.⁷⁰ The Ministry of Foreign Affairs now felt that, given the incorrect information about the whole incident in the press, it would be appropriate to issue a press correction. The ministry believed that this would be good for Czechoslovak-American relations, but could damage those with Yugoslavia. It therefore proposed that if such a report were to be published, it should be "*as inconspicuous as possible.*" However, to my knowledge, it was not published.⁷¹

5. ***Usability in the ideological struggle.*** When Lieutenant Roland was handed over from Czechoslovak internment in Rozvadov on 4 July 1951, representatives of the press and film crews were present on the American side: the American air attaché in Czechoslovakia, Lieutenant Colonel Edward B. Whitman, commented that "*this will be a big sensation in America.*"⁷² The Czechoslovak side, on the other hand, documented the handover on film and in photographs exclusively for its own security purposes. Foreign policy, and even more so foreign policy towards Eastern Europe, was usually only of interest to the general American public in cases where the fate of "American boys" was directly at stake. The propaganda use of the most serious incidents was therefore directed primarily outwards, to influence world public opinion, especially in Third World countries. For similar reasons, the Czechoslovak leadership was clearly very

26/11.

68 IRRA, *Vysoká, ohlédnutí po letech*, pp. 84-85.

69 AMZV, f. TO – T, 1955–1959, USA, b. 3, *Přelet amerických letadel 27. 7. 1957*, r. n. 017522/57; RP, 30. 7. 1957, vol. 37, no. 210, p. 3, *Protest proti porušení československého vzdušného prostoru americkými letadly*.

70 AMZV, f. TO – T, 1955–1959, USA, b. 3, *Přelet*, r. n. 017522/57. Contrary to Voráček's recollection, the Yugoslav ambassador stated that the aircraft still bore American insignia.

71 Ibid.

72 AMZV, f. SM – T, 1945–1963, Široký, b. 9, složka Briggs, František Chalupa's report, 10. 7. 1951 no r. n.

upset by any disruption of the positive image of the communist system and the exposure of its inhumane, criminal nature. An analysis of the press coverage of the shooting of the Skyraiders in the spring of 1954, probably prepared by the embassy in Washington, indignantly stated that “*the most serious attacks against Czechoslovakia and the entire peace camp and the lies in their portrayal of the situation... were committed by the leading American newspapers intended for foreign readers, i.e. for the widest possible audience,*” and that “*...the American incident on the Czechoslovak border has once again become new evidence of the inflammatory policy of the American authorities against the peace camp.*”⁷³ One of the key points on which Czechoslovak diplomacy insisted in settling the incident involving the detention of two German pilots who crashed an F-84 in 1959 was the demand that the Bonn government work to curb “*hostile statements*” against Czechoslovakia.⁷⁴ The use of military aviation incidents for domestic propaganda purposes was particularly prevalent in the 1950s. Although there are statements and articles interpreting air incidents as a consequence of American preparations for another war,⁷⁵ the most extensive campaigns focused primarily on (false) comparisons of how humanely the Czechoslovak side treated interned pilots and how the Americans proceeded in similar cases.⁷⁶ Some cases clearly show that the regime did not actually want its Western opponents to appear more humane: in November 1970, *Rudé Právo* published a short note about a Czechoslovak diplomatic protest against the violation of the border by American helicopters (27 October and 1 November 1970). This was followed by an American apology

73 AMZV, f. TO – T, 1945–1954, USA, b. 14, *Incident amerických letců nad čs. – německou hranicí z března t. r. – přehled amerického tisku*, r. n. 173042/54.

74 NA, f. KSČ-ÚV-AN II, b. 150, *Protestní nóty*, r. n. 23-26/11.,

75 “*What are American military aircraft photographing our border areas for? After the experience with Hitler, every child in Czechoslovakia knows that this is nothing more than war preparations, such as those carried out by world imperialism in Korea...!*” Projev ministra národní obrany Alexeje Čepičky. In RP, 14. 8. 1951, Vol. 31-32, no. 143, p. 3; Památce soudruha Klementa Gottwalda. In RP, 17. 3. 1953, Vol. 33-34, no. 76, p. 6.

76 Dvě svědectví. In RP, 9. 8. 1951, Vol. 31-32, no. 186, p. 2; Pro srovnání. In RP, 4. 10. 1951, Vol. 31-32, no. 234, p. 4; Provokace rušitelů míru. In RP, 13. 2. 1954, Vol. 34-35, no. 43, p. 2. This article compares the treatment of pilot Roland with the case of Corporal Jiří Šorm and Lieutenant František Zavdilík, who were forced to land near Bayreuth on 5 February 1954 due to loss of orientation. Jiří Šorm requested political asylum, and only Zavdilík was repatriated to Czechoslovakia. However, Czechoslovak propaganda claimed that Šorm’s emigration was forced, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs protested against Šorm’s “violent detention.” Nota čs. Ministerstva zahraničních věcí velvyslanectví USA. In RP, 11. 2. 1954, Vol. 34-35, no. 41, pp. 1-2.

stating that it was an unintentional overflight due to the pilots losing their bearings. During his visit to Eduard Bílek, First Secretary of the American Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, on 30 November 1970, Arthur Wortzel, Counsellor at the American Embassy, handed over an American note of apology to⁷⁷ and asked whether it would also be published in the press, as the Czechoslovak one had been. However, the Sixth Territorial Department recommended that the note should not be published.⁷⁸ In some cases, press releases contained deliberate half-truths or outright lies: In 1956, the International Court of Justice definitively removed the American lawsuit concerning the shooting down of an American Thunderjet on 10 March 1953 (see above) from the list of lawsuits, as it was not possible to hear the case without the consent of the Czechoslovak side under the Statute of the International Court of Justice. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs considered it appropriate to publish a report on the removal of the lawsuit, “without mentioning that this was due to the Czechoslovak Republic’s refusal to submit to its [the International Court of Justice’s] jurisdiction”.⁷⁹ The report on the tragic shooting down of a West German Cessna on 3 October 1963 (see above) was completely fabricated, according to which the pilot was forced to land, causing the plane to crash.⁸⁰ Most other references to aviation incidents are merely brief reproductions of Czechoslovak notes.⁸¹ One exception is the attempt

77 Arthur Irwin Wortzel (1919–2007), Harvard graduate, career diplomat, expert on Eastern Europe.

78 MZV, f. TO – T, 1970–1974, USA, b. 1, r. n. 026480/70-6; Protestní nota velvyslanectví USA. In RP, 17. 11. 1970, Vol. 50-51, no. 273, p. 1.

79 AMZV, f. TO – T, 1955–1959, USA, b. 4, *Letecký incident 10. 3. 1953*, r. n. 114207/56. As far as I know, the report was never published.

80 Sdělení ČTK k narušení vzdušného prostoru ČSSR. In RP, 5. 10. 1963, Vol. 43-44, no. 275, p. 1.

81 Osobní nota náměstka předsedy vlády a ministra zahraničních věcí Viliama Širokého velvyslanci Spojených států amerických v Praze. In RP, 23. 6. 1951, Vol. 31-32, no. 147, p. 1; Nota československé vlády americkému velvyslanectví. In RP, 30. 6. 1951, Vol. 31-32, no. 153, p. 2; Nota ministerstva zahraničních věcí americkému velvyslanectví v Praze. In RP, 25. 4. 1954, Vol. 34-35, no. 113, p. 2; Nota čs. Ministerstva zahraničních věcí velvyslanectví USA. In RP, 11. 2. 1954, Vol. 34-35, no. 41, pp. 1-2; Protest proti přeletům amerických letadel. In RP, 22. 7. 1956, Vol. 36, no. 203, p. 2; Protest proti porušení československého vzdušného prostoru americkými letadly. In RP, 30. 7. 1957, Vol. 37, no. 210, p. 3; Protest československé vlády proti narušení území ČSR vojenskými letadly USA. In RP, 2. 12. 1958, Vol. 38, no. 335, p. 1; Přistání italského vojenského letadla v ČSR. In RP, 31. 10. 1959, Vol. 39, no. 301, p. 1; Západoněmečtí letci vyhoštěni z ČSR. In RP, 3. 12. 1959, Vol. 39, no. 334, p. 2; Hrubé porušení čs. svrchovanosti letounem USA. In RP, 19. 7. 1961, Vol. 41-42, no. 199, pp. 1-3; Protestní nota velvyslanectví USA. In RP, 17. 11. 1970, Vol. 50-51, no. 273, p. 1; Narušení čs. vzdušného prostoru. In RP, 27. 3. 1968, Vol. 48-49, no. 86, p. 3; noticka Československé letadlo typu

to conduct a press campaign against the Federal Republic of Germany in connection with the case of two of its pilots who were interned in 1959.⁸² The matter was also mentioned by Antonín Novotný during a trip by a Czechoslovak party and government delegation to the GDR.⁸³ Content analysis of the main press organ of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, *Rudé právo*, shows that the use of air incidents for domestic propaganda purposes was not nearly as intense as we might have expected. It seems that those who made the decisions were not interested in inadvertently revealing the full extent of American violations of Czechoslovak airspace. Czechoslovak citizens might have questioned the republic's ability to defend itself or pondered the technological superiority of the West that made such violations possible. This is clearly evident in the discussion at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs regarding the possibility of publishing the Czechoslovak note to the American Embassy dated 20 July 1956 protesting against the overflights of American aircraft on 9 March, 4 May, 20 June, 2 July and 9 July 1956. The ministry did not find the information about the frequency of the overflights problematic, but rather the fact that American aircraft were literally criss-crossing the republic at that time. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs ultimately recommended that the note be published, "...but without details of individual overflights, as the publication of such information could provoke an unfavourable public reaction, especially with regard to American aircraft flying over Ostrava, eastern Slovakia, etc."⁸⁴

6. **Dependence on the Soviet position.** In serious cases, such as the shooting down of an American Thunderjet on 10 March 1953, Czechoslovak diplomacy took into account primarily the position of the Soviet side and its needs in the context of the current international situation. The Czechoslovak government decided at that time (after finally rejecting the American note of 18 August 1954, see above) that it would not agree to the case being heard by the International Court of Justice. It submitted this intention in the form of an aide-mémoire to the Soviet ambassador (although the original draft document stated "*for consultation with Soviet comrades*"). The American-British Department proposed that further

MIG. In RP, 2. 12. 1967, Vol. 47-48, no. 332, p. 6.

82 Bonnská vláda je plně odpovědna za narušování čs. vzdušného prostoru. In RP, 3. 12. 1959, Vol. 39, no. 334, pp. 1-2. Following the decision to release both German pilots on 2 December 1959, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs held a special press conference for domestic and foreign journalists.

83 Přípitek soudruha Novotného. In RP, 26. 11. 1959, Vol. 39, no. 327, p. 4.

84 AMZV, f. TO – T, 1955–1959, USA, b. 3, r. n. 129968/56-ABO/1.

official steps be postponed until the Ministry of Foreign Affairs received the Soviet position. The Soviets approved the planned Czechoslovak note, but in the meantime the Americans referred the matter to the International Court of Justice and the note was not sent.⁸⁵ In 1960, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs asked the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs whether, in the context of the well-known shooting down of an American U-2 spy plane on 1 May 1960, the Czechoslovak approach to American overflights was not too “toothless”. The Soviet response, recommending that the matter be referred to the UN General Assembly, did not arrive until the second half of the year.⁸⁶ Therefore, when an American RB-47H spy plane was shot down by the Soviets in the Barents Sea on 1 July 1960 (four of the six crew members were killed), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs proposed a “broad press campaign” in support of the USSR, while recommending that no official statements be made on its own cases until the Soviet position was received.⁸⁷

Conclusion

An analysis of the diplomatic activity of the Czechoslovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs in cases of military air incidents in the 1950s and 1960s revealed several interesting things. Although Czechoslovak foreign policy was completely in line with that of the Soviet Union on fundamental issues, and although it was a confrontational, power-based policy in the context of the Cold War, Czechoslovak diplomacy demonstrated a notable degree of political realism and pragmatism. This was, of course, partly due to the fact that, compared to the army and the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs did not always have all the information at its disposal; moreover, its approach was primarily determined by how the soldiers would react – would they use force or hand the matter over to the diplomats? The Ministry of Foreign Affairs was, after all, the weaker partner in relation to the Ministry of National Defence. I consider Czechoslovak diplomacy in the case of the air incidents to be realistic, primarily because its form, steps and means can be described as essentially conventional.⁸⁸ Communist diplomats

85 AMZV, f. TO – T, 1955–1959, USA, b. 4, r. n. 411116/55, *Letecký incident 10. 3. 1953*; r. n. 412091/55; r. n. 414622/55-ABO/1, *Dopis ministra zahraničních věcí – předsedovi vlády*, April 1955, copy of the final draft.

86 AMZV, f. TO – T, 1960–1964, USA, b. 3, 028952/60-6/1.

87 AMZV, f. TO – T, 1960–1964, USA, b. 3, čj. 027537/60-6/1, *Informace pro soudruha ministra*; r. n. 026748/60.

88 I will, of course, leave aside the question of how realistic the strategic goals of the Soviet bloc were during the Cold War.

quickly adopted established diplomatic protocol and ensured its observance.⁸⁹ In direct contact with American diplomats, factual diplomatic arguments prevailed.⁹⁰ In these cases, Czechoslovak diplomacy also generally observed the limits imposed on it by international law.⁹¹ All this was made possible and, to a certain extent, was probably due to the fact that most of the officials in the highest echelons of the ministry who decided on these incidents were, despite their political determination, high-quality experts with a good education. Perhaps most interesting about the argument for Czechoslovak diplomatic realism is that Czechoslovak (and, it should be added, neither American nor German) diplomacy never escalated tensions beyond the point where events could spiral out of control. Further research will show to what extent the thesis of the relative realism of Czechoslovak diplomacy in military air incidents can be applied to the entire diplomacy of communist Czechoslovakia. However, it should always be borne in mind that diplomacy was only an instrument for implementing foreign policy, which was essentially in the hands of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia.

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89 For example, ministry officials carefully considered whether it was sufficient to deliver a protest note verbally or whether a written form was necessary. AMZV, f. TO – T, 1955–1959, USA, b. 4, Letecký incident 10. 3. 1953, r. n. 171478/54-ABO/1, Draft responses to the American note of 8 February 1954.

90 See, for example, the record of the conversation between Ambassador Briggs and Minister Široký in MZV, f. SM – T, 1945–1963, Široký, b. 9, Briggs file. *Pristanie dvoch tryskových letadiel, Záznam z návštevy amerického veľvyslance Briggse u s. ministra v pátek dne 15. 6. 1951*, free reconstruction by František Chalupa, no r. n.

91 In connection with the detention of two pilots (and their aircraft) who made an emergency landing in Prague on 8 June 1951, JUDr. Pavol Winkler prepared a legal opinion stating that the aircraft could be detained for a certain period of time, but not confiscated. *Ibid.*, *Záznam pro s. ministra, tajné, secret*, 12 June 1951, no r. n.

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