

Babiš nominates army veteran to lead Czech defense ministry

By Csongor Körömi · Nov 26, 2025, 6:48 PM · [View in your browser](#)

The [new populist Czech government of Andrej Babiš](#) sent a soothing signal on its commitment to NATO and Ukraine by [nominating non-partisan retired Lt. Gen. Jaromír Zůna](#) on Wednesday to be the country's new defense minister.

The defense ministry was handed to the far-right Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD) party under the coalition agreement creating the new government, raising fears about the country's direction.

Zůna's deputy will be the SPD's Radovan Vích, who has claimed that Ukraine is an "artificially created state" that "provoked" its ongoing war against Russia. He also once [said](#) that if neighboring Poland were attacked by Russia, Czech troops should not be sent to help.

What that means for the country's defense policy is still unclear, but President Petr Pavel, also a retired general, has insisted that Babiš's new government not undermine the country's traditional security relationships.

"From what we know about [Zůna], he clearly understands the value of international cooperation and military alliances, including the Czech Republic's NATO membership," said Michal Smetana, director of the Prague-based Peace Research Center think tank.

"Zůna has sufficient experience operating in these multilateral settings, and I have not seen any indications that he questions the importance of allied commitments and investments in bolstering defense capabilities," he added.

Smetana added that Zůna also has ties to the Czech arms industry. "As such, his nomination could signal important patterns of continuity in Czech defense policy rather than a radical break from what we have seen in recent years."

Zůna's nomination could be well received in the army, said Martin Vokálek, head of the Brussels office of the Czech think tank Europeum.

Vokálek said that Zůna's relationship with his deputy Vích will be crucial.

"The biggest question mark would be whether he would be more of a technocratic, administrative minister or try to play political games, and how well he would do," Vokálek said.

Ultimately, it's up to Babiš how much leeway he'll give his nationalist coalition partners in the government. "Babiš wants to control everything. He's a huge fan of

micromanagement, and he would try to maintain as much influence over the political direction as possible," Vokálek said.

Smetana agreed that, regardless of who serves as defense minister, policy will primarily reflect Babiš's views.

While Babiš is unlikely to revisit NATO's defense spending goal set in The Hague this summer, Smetana said the new government's position on aiding Ukraine, particularly regarding a Czech initiative to source artillery ammunition for Kyiv, is more difficult to assess.

Before the election, Babiš and his coalition allies [campaigned](#) against the ammunition effort, calling it "rotten" and saying it should be managed at NATO level. After the vote, Babiš [changed tack](#) and now says it is "a good idea in principle."

"Rather than canceling it altogether, I believe the initiative will undergo rebranding and continue in some form," Smetana said. "The argument will be that it is now more transparent and more effective under the new government's oversight."