

Best of friends, biggest of enemies

Two Castle-friendly media outlets, [Deník N](#) and [Respekt](#), broke the story last week that U.S. Amb. Nicholas Merrick and U.S. Gen. Curtis Buzzard, together with Pres. Petr Pavel, met for a secret meeting with Andrej Babiš at the Castle right after Babiš was appointed PM on Tues., Dec. 9. They reportedly waited until Babiš was appointed so that they could discuss classified security information with him. Deník N and Respekt, and apparently their sources, saw the articles as a way to put pressure on Babiš to continue the defense programs begun by the government of Petr Fiala.

However, few other Castle-friendly media outlets picked up the story. As far as we can tell, Czech TV and Czech Radio completely ignored it, presumably out of fear that a report about it would show how much pressure the U.S. government is exerting on the president and the new PM in terms of defense spending. It's not exactly normal for the PM of a sovereign country to be corralled first thing into such a meeting with a foreign ambassador and told to buy something.

Amb. Merrick apparently realizes the delicacy of this, because he's acting as though the meeting never took place. He told [MFD this week](#) that he spoke with Babiš before Babiš was appointed PM and that he would like to take the opportunity to pass on his congratulations on the appointment through the newspaper. Babiš was very careful not to talk like the PM when he still wasn't, Merrick added, thereby indicating that he and Babiš last spoke before the appointment on Dec. 9.

Babiš and Merrick [first met on Oct. 27](#), soon after Pavel asked him to try to form a new government. But they also met on Dec. 9, at least according to Castle sources, by which point Babiš was of course already the PM, otherwise he couldn't have received the secret information. Merrick glossed over this second meeting, though, and MFD didn't ask. Nor did the Castle issue one of its regular press releases.

Since that meeting, both Pavel and Merrick have increased their public pressure on Babiš to honor the existing defense-spending commitments. U.S. Pres. Donald Trump joined in by writing on [Truth Social](#) that, "Andrej knows how to get Deals done, and I expected incredible things from him, including on F-35s."

The New York Times



(The past tense of "expected" is presumably just a typographical error.)

Babiš's job is to buy the fighter planes and other high-priced U.S. military equipment, which means that Trump and Merrick are pushing the Czech Republic down the same path that the [Editorial Board of the New York Times](#) says could be devastating for the United States. The NYT drew from a classified assessment of U.S. military capabilities called the Overmatch brief and said that the need to make change in the way the military works is urgent. "The question is whether we will do so in time," the NYT said.

The brief, according to the newspaper, underscores the need for a fundamental reinvention of the U.S. military moving away from legacy platforms - like the F-35 - toward more-agile, rapidly producible, and adaptable technologies. It calls for reforms in acquisition processes, reduced bureaucratic inertia in Congress and the Pentagon, stronger alliances and a focus on deterrence and diplomacy to avoid escalation, rather than pouring resources into outdated military systems.

The Trump administration wants to increase defense spending in 2026 to more than \$1 trillion, the Times said. "Much of that money will be squandered

on capabilities that do more to magnify our weaknesses than to sharpen our strengths." The global consequences could be dire, the newspaper added.

Merrick's pitch to the CR, as told to [Reflex last week](#), is that Europe is very important to Trump, Vice Pres. JD Vance and Foreign Secretary Marco Rubio and

that the U.S. will double down in a more positive way toward countries like the CR that it is on the same page with. Babiš ran on a Czechia First platform, Merrick said, which is quite close to Trump's own agenda. This is great, Merrick said, but part of Czechia First is also honoring the obligations.

In other words, remaining on the same page with Trump means buying military

equipment from him. Whether this leads to increased defense isn't a top priority, otherwise the NYT wouldn't have needed to write about the current crisis.

This puts Babiš in a tight spot. He wants to be on good terms with the Trump administration, and he reportedly wants another visit to the White House. But if he reneges on his promise to spend defense money more wisely, he'll lose voter support and maneuvering room, in addition to the significant issue of spending money without increasing defense.

In a very real sense, the Trump administration and Babiš government are both the best of friends and the biggest of enemies. They see mostly eye to eye on civilizational issues and what needs to be done to get Europe back on track, but they're miles apart on the practical issue of defense. Babiš needs to find a way to explain to his American friends that if they insist on being enemies in this respect, they risk pushing the CR into the same kind of deep decline and "civilizational erasure" that Trump warned about in the [National Security Strategy](#). Simply put, Babiš needs to hold the National Security Strategy up to Trump's face and explain to him that friends don't force friends to go down the road to oblivion.