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Laura Scotto di Clemente



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Unveiling the Chessboard: Macron's Gambit, NATO's Dilemma, and Putin's Warning Amidst the Ukraine Crisis

by Laura Scotto di Clemente *

1. Macron's controversial stance on Western troop deployment to Ukraine: a closer look and its aftermath

In the last weeks, French President Emmanuel Macron defended his deliberate choice not to rule out the potential deployment of Western troops to Ukraine despite the controversy it has generated. Brushing off criticism from both domestic and international circles, Macron emphasized the careful consideration behind his statements regarding Russian aggression towards Ukraine. Speaking to reporters during a visit to the 2024 Olympic village near Paris, Macron underscored the gravity of the current geopolitical situation, stating that each word uttered on this matter was meticulously weighed and measured.

While the idea faced staunch opposition from NATO allies like the US, the UK, and Germany, it found some support from countries like [Estonia and Lithuania](#). French officials sought to downplay Macron's remarks, pointing to potential activities such as demining and arms production that could involve Western presence in Ukraine. During a meeting with French Foreign Minister Stéphane Séjourné, Lithuanian Foreign Minister Gabrielius Landsbergis said, *"There cannot be any 'buts.' We must draw red lines for Russia, not ourselves. No form of support for Ukraine can be excluded. We need to continue supporting Ukraine wherever it's most needed"*, highlighting his [worries](#) about Moscow setting its prospects on the Baltic countries, which used to be part of the Soviet Union and are now members of the EU and NATO.

Meanwhile, the speaker of Russia's lower house of Parliament cautioned Macron against sending troops, making historical parallels with [Napoleon's ill-fated campaign in 1812](#).

During the following days, France's Foreign Minister Stéphane Séjourné, [emphasized](#) the necessity of considering new measures to support Ukraine, highlighting areas such as mine clearance, cyber defense, and localized weapon production on Ukrainian soil. The French Foreign Minister asserted that certain actions [might necessitate a presence in Ukraine](#) without it to necessarily escalate to combat. Therefore, Séjourné reiterated that Macron's stance remained open to various possibilities, emphasizing the President's willingness to explore unconventional avenues of support.

However, following Macron's statement the news is likely to be more than contradictory. On the one hand is the position of Elysian diplomacy, which has clarified that Macron's intention was to [stimulate discourse on the matter](#) rather than propose concrete plans for troop deployment, combined to the deliberately reassuring and influential tones of the [President's interview](#) given to TF1. On the other hand, [POLITICO](#) published an article highlighting that the French troops are adapting their training for [potential high-intensity conflicts](#) against adversaries like Russia, moving away from counterinsurgency tactics. The combat training center ([CENTAC](#)) in eastern France simulates battlefield conditions, emphasizing combined arms warfare and the use of advanced technology. Lessons from Ukraine highlight the importance of coordination and resilience. Soldiers undergo intense, 96-hour exercises, learning to operate without electronic devices and manage logistical challenges. Emphasis is placed on soldiers' adaptability and decision-making under pressure. The goal is to ensure readiness and effectiveness in modern warfare scenarios.

2. Macron's speech to the Nation: "Russian victory would undermine EU security"

Last Thursday, March 14, on French national television, President Emmanuel Macron restated his resolute stance on the ongoing crisis in Ukraine. During the interview, Macron articulated his belief that the conflict in Ukraine carries [profound implications for the security and integrity of Europe as a whole](#). He stated that any limitations imposed on aid to Ukraine would ultimately amount to [choosing defeat](#) in the face of Russian aggression. Macron warned that a scenario in which Russia emerges victorious in Ukraine would not only erode Europe's credibility but also [jeopardize its very security](#), reducing it to a severe state of vulnerability.

Against this backdrop, Macron called for a lucid reassessment of the prevailing circumstances, urging resolute action to prevent Russia from achieving its objectives in Ukraine. He addressed to the entire Nation, highlighting that *"la sécurité des Français se joue en Ukraine"*.

Moreover, Macron's remarks reflect a broader diplomatic landscape in which tensions and diverging perspectives among European leaders have come to the forefront. While some leaders, such as the German Chancellor and the President of the United States, expressed profound reservations about such a move, Macron reiterated that all options, including the deployment of troops, should remain on the table.

In light of these developments, Macron's interview underscores the need for a [unified and decisive approach](#) among European nations in addressing the crisis in Ukraine. Despite facing pushback from certain quarters, Macron has consistently advocated for robust support for Ukraine, viewing it as essential for safeguarding Europe's security and integrity in the face of external threats.

* Research Assistant at Beyond the Horizon ISSG

The President's speech is lucid and firm and almost reminiscent of fatherly tones toward the audience. It is clear that the purpose of the interview, for Macron, was partly to encourage, partly to warn the French people. The voice does not tremble, nor does it contain overly aggressive words. The message is very clear: reinterpreting Churchill's famous Fulton speech, the French President reminds that today we must have "*Le nerf de la paix*", adding that "*vouloir la paix ce n'est pas choisir la défaite, ce n'est pas laisser tomber l'Ukraine*".

3. Other NATO Allies' position

The discourse surrounding the potential deployment of ground troops to Ukraine has ignited an outbreak of responses from various NATO countries, juxtaposing differing stances and strategies in navigating the conflict. French President Emmanuel Macron's assertion that "[nothing should be ruled out](#)" concerning potential deployments prompted mainly negative, but also positive, reactions from leaders across NATO allies, amplifying the complexity of the situation. While acknowledging the possibility of security needs justifying elements of deployment, Macron emphasized France's commitment to a nuanced approach in the face of mounting tensions. In response, US President Joe Biden reiterated his administration's stance, emphasizing a path to victory through [military aid rather than direct troop engagement](#). This sentiment was echoed by German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, who highlighted existing agreements barring European or NATO member states from deploying troops to Ukraine, aside from limited training missions. Italy echoed similar sentiments, stating that international support for Ukraine should not involve ground troop presence, and cautioned against escalating tensions with Russia.

Sweden, the newest NATO's ally, indicated that it does not envision sending ground troops to Ukraine at the present moment.

On the contrary, [Lithuanian Foreign Minister Gabrielius Landsbergis](#) has expressed openness to the discussions initiated by the French President regarding the possibility of NATO sending troops to Ukraine. Landsbergis emphasized that amidst the current crisis, no option should be dismissed outright. He highlighted the importance of ongoing discussions, noting that such deliberations prevent Putin from benefiting further from the situation.

While underscoring the importance of establishing clear red lines and avoiding strategic dilemmas for the Russian army within Ukraine, Landsbergis emphasized that it is [premature](#) to determine the most suitable options for troop deployment. He reiterated, though, that all possibilities should remain on the table.

Meanwhile, [NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg](#) maintained that the alliance's military support for Ukraine would remain limited to the supply of ammunition and equipment without considering any troop deployment. As discussions unfold, the urgency of the situation is underscored by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's appeal for creating a collective defense against Russian aggression. Zelenskyy's participation in the [Paris meeting](#) via video link highlighted the gravity of the crisis and the imperative for international solidarity in confronting the ongoing conflict.

4. Ukrainian partnerships with France, Germany, and Poland

In February, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy solidified crucial partnerships with France and Germany, securing [long-term security pacts](#) with both nations. In a significant move, Ukraine and France inked a bilateral security agreement to bolster Kyiv's defense against Russia. The agreement, signed by Zelenskyy and French President Emmanuel Macron, outlines [commitments](#) from Paris to provide increased arms support, train Ukrainian soldiers, and allocate up to three billion euros (\$3.23bn) in military aid over the course of a decade. Additionally, the pact underscores mutual efforts to [enhance cooperation in artillery](#) procurement while facilitating Ukraine's future integration into the European Union and NATO. In this occasion, President Zelenskyy emphasized the tangible impact of this collaboration on social media, noting its significance in defending lives within Ukraine and across Europe. Similarly, Ukraine sealed another pact with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, signifying Germany's commitment to [backing Ukraine with military assistance](#) and imposing sanctions on Russia, alongside measures to maintain Russian assets frozen. Germany also allocated an immediate aid package totaling [1.13 billion euros](#) (\$1.22bn), primarily for air defense and artillery support. These diplomatic endeavors unfolded amid escalating tensions in Avdiivka, as Ukrainian forces faced mounting pressure from advancing Russian troops. Ukraine's efforts have been troubled by a shortage of ammunition exacerbated by delays in Western military aid. Zelenskyy's diplomatic overtures reflect Ukraine's proactive stance in seeking international support amid the ongoing conflict with Russia.

More recently, on March 15th, during a summit of the "[Weimar Triangle](#)", German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, French President Emmanuel Macron, and Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk reaffirmed their solidarity with Ukraine. Tusk emphasized the situation's urgency, expressing a collective determination to prevent Russia from prevailing and to support Ukraine until the end. Despite being key allies of Ukraine, some differences between Scholz and Macron were evident, particularly regarding the potential deployment of Western ground troops, which remains a point of contention. While Macron has suggested not ruling out such a possibility in the future, Scholz has maintained a stance against deploying ground troops on Ukrainian soil. This discrepancy underscores the difficulty in achieving a unified approach among European countries.

5. French and Germany military aids to Ukraine: a comparison

Germany's assistance is structured in [two main categories](#): financial aid from the Federal Government's security

capacity building initiative and direct provision of materials from the Federal Armed Forces' supplies. In terms of financial support, Germany has allocated significant funds for the military assistance, with approximately 28 billion euros earmarked or already made available for Ukraine's support over the next few years. This includes contributions to the European Peace Facility (EPF) and commitments worth about 6 billion euros for future years.

[France's contributions](#) primarily consist of a diverse range of equipment aimed at supporting Ukraine's immediate combat capabilities. In total, French military aid value to Ukraine amounts to 2.615 billion euros, plus a contribution of 1.2 billion euros to the European Peace Facility.

Both countries have provided training to Ukrainian troops, with more than 10,000 Ukrainian soldiers trained by the [French](#) and [German](#) militaries in Poland, Germany and France. Comparing the assistance provided by France and Germany, both countries have demonstrated significant commitment to bolstering Ukraine's defense capacities. In this period of [artillery scarcity](#), though, it is necessary to clarify how the two different countries contributed to this.

ALREADY DELIVERED ARTILLERY TO UKRAINE	
GERMANY	FRANCE
68,000 rounds 155mm ammunition	TRF1 Howitzer: 6
ammunition for multiple rocket launchers MARS II	CAESAR Gun: 30
20,872 rounds 155mm smoke/illuminating ammunition	Unitary Rocket Launcher: 4
2 wheeled self-propelled howitzer Zuzana 2	120 mm Mortar: 10
155mm precision guided ammunition (SMArt, VULCANO)	155 mm CAESAR & TRF1: 30,000
5 multiple rocket launchers MARS II with ammunition	105 mm AMX10 RC: 9,000
14 PzH 2000 with spare parts	
20 rocket launchers 70mm on pick-up trucks with rockets	
counter battery radar system COBRA	
10 laser target designators and portable fire control modules for VULCANO artillery ammunition	



Obviously, certain details regarding some military deliveries, particularly about orders in planning are classified. However, on the part of the German government, some decisions have already been made. According to the [Federal Government](#), the following artillery will be delivered to Ukraine in the upcoming months:

- 36 wheeled self-propelled howitzers RCH 155
- 18 self-propelled howitzers PzH 2000
- more than 120,000 projectiles 122mm
- more than 250,000 projectiles 155mm
- 14 wheeled self-propelled howitzer Zuzana 2 (project jointly financed with Denmark and Norway)

On the other hand, the Elysée does not yet provide clear and concrete directions, probably because still in the de-

cision-making phase. On this regard, profound criticism has arisen regarding France's ranking in military support for Kyiv. French Defence Minister Sébastien Lecornu expressed dissatisfaction with the methodology and validity of rankings provided by the German research group [Kiel Institute](#), which placed France behind other European countries in terms of military support for Ukraine. Back in January, following discussions between the French Defence Minister and his Ukrainian counterpart Roustem Umerov, the Elysée has embarked on the new agreement to reinforce Ukraine's defense capabilities, entailing France to take charge of steering an ammunition and missile production coalition for Ukraine. The newly-launched "[Artillery for Ukraine](#)" coalition aims to strengthen military support for Kyiv both in the short and long term.

6. Empowering Europe's Defense: funding initiatives to strengthen industrial readiness and innovation

The European Commission has taken significant steps to reinforce the community's defense capabilities and support its defense industry through several key initiatives, allocating substantial funding and resources to address critical needs.

Firstly, the Commission allocated €500 million under the [Act in Support of Ammunition Production \(ASAP\)](#). This funding aims to enhance Europe's ammunition production capacity to 2 million shells annually by 2025. The Commission swiftly evaluated the A.S.A.P. Regulation and selected [31 projects](#) to increase ammunition production and readiness. These plans span explosives, powder, shells, missile production, testing, and reconditioning certification. The funding, totaling €513 million from EU and Norway budgets, will leverage additional investment from the industry, amounting to around €1.4 billion. The focus of A.S.A.P. on powder and explosives, critical for ammunition shell production, is expected to significantly booster production capacities.

Secondly, the Commission launched the Work Program for the instrument to reinforce the European defense industry through common procurement ([EDIRPA](#)) and the fourth annual Work Programme of the European Defense Fund ([EDF](#)). These programs, with a combined budget of nearly [€2 billion](#), aim to incentivize joint procurement efforts among Member States and support defense research and development (R&D) projects. EDIRPA, with a budget of €310 million, encourages Member States to collectively acquire defense products, particularly in areas like ammunition, air and missile defense, and platform replacement. Meanwhile, the EDF, with an allocation of €1.1 billion, focuses on funding R&D projects.

The initiatives follow the adoption of the first [European Defense Industrial Strategy](#) (EDIS) and the proposal for a European Defense Industry Programme (EDIP). These measures underscore a concerted effort to strengthen the European defense technological and industrial base and ensure promptness in responding to evolving security challenges. The funding priorities are aligned with the capability needs identified by Member States within the Common Security and Defense Policy ([CSDP](#)) framework, aiming to foster innovation, interoperability, and the cross-border participation of SMEs.

Meanwhile, Pentagon said it will provide approximately [\\$300 million in weapons](#) to Ukraine following a discovery of cost savings in its contracts, despite facing a significant deficit of around \$10 billion in replenishing the weapons drawn from its stocks to assist Ukraine. This aid package, the first announced since December, arrives at a critical moment as Ukraine faces [a dire shortage of munitions](#), with efforts to secure additional funding for weapons procurement stalled in Congress.

While the aid provides a much-needed improvement to Ukraine's military efforts, it is not an efficient solution, and the Pentagon emphasizes the necessity of passing the stalled supplemental spending bill, which includes approximately [\\$60 billion in military aid](#) for Ukraine. The aid announcement coincides with Polish President Andrzej Duda's and Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk's [visit](#) on 12 March to Washington, urging the U.S. to address the funding impasse. However, efforts to pass the [aid package](#) face hurdles in Congress, with Republican opposition hindering progress. The Pentagon's reliance on cost savings to provide additional weapons underscores the challenges posed by inflationary pressures and the higher costs of replacing outdated systems. The aid, primarily drawn from army stockpiles, highlights the strain on U.S. resources and the need for sustained support to bolster Ukraine's defence capabilities amidst escalating conflict.

7. Russian position on the matter

Russian President Vladimir Putin issued a stark warning to the West, emphasizing the gravity of the situation. He warned that a direct confrontation between Russia and the U.S.-led NATO alliance could escalate into World War Three. Despite this warning, Putin stressed that such a scenario was [not desired by anyone](#). The ongoing conflict in Ukraine has plunged Moscow's relations with the West into their most profound crisis since the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962.

Putin, who has frequently highlighted the dangers of nuclear conflict, reiterated that he had never considered employing nuclear weapons in Ukraine. However, he acknowledged the presence of [NATO military personnel in Ukraine](#), noting instances where English and French were spoken on the battlefield. With a post on Telegram,

Chairman of the State Duma Vyacheslav Volodin responded to Macron's statement, saying, "[Before making such statements, Macron would do well to remember how it ended for Napoleon and his soldiers, more than 600,000 of whom were left lying in the damp earth](#)".

Moreover, in response to French President Emmanuel Macron's remarks regarding the potential deployment of ground troops in Ukraine, Putin cryptically remarked [that "everything is possible in the modern world"](#), suggesting that while the French President does not intend to eliminate the possibility of disposing troops in Ukraine, the Russian President does not rule out the use of nuclear power. He cautioned that any escalation would bring the world perilously close to a full-scale global conflict, a prospect few would welcome.

In the days before the Russian elections, Putin addressed Ukraine's increased attacks on Russian border regions, indicating that Russia might establish a buffer zone from Ukrainian territory to [safeguard its borders](#) if the assaults persisted. He refrained from providing specific details but suggested that such an area might be necessary to prevent foreign-made armaments from reaching Russian soil.

Putin expressed his desire for peace talks in Ukraine –of course, at his terms –, urging Macron and France to contribute to finding another resolution to the conflict rather than exacerbating it further. Moreover, he condemned Western criticism of the Russian election, particularly from the United States, dismissing it as [hypocritical](#) and questioning the democratic legitimacy of U.S. elections.

8. Conclusions and Strategic Foresight

Macron's bold stance on considering all options, including Western troop deployment to Ukraine, demonstrates a nuanced understanding of the crisis's severity. By emphasizing the existential threat posed by Russian aggression and the need for unwavering support for Ukraine, Macron aims to rally European unity and resolve against external threats. However, this standpoint has sparked controversy, with divisions within NATO and skepticism from some European allies complicating efforts to present a united front. While countries like Lithuania express openness to discussions on troop deployment, others, like Germany, choose diplomatic and economic measures over military intervention. This divergence highlights the challenges of *consensus-building* within the alliance and the need for careful diplomacy to bridge differing perspectives. There's a real and strong fear of military escalation. However, especially following the clarifications exhibited by the Elysian President on national TV, it is not believed that this mere statement can significantly change relations between the allies or create more consternation than a simple political statement can do.

For its part, [Kyiv believes](#) that if such a decision is ever made, Western partners are unlikely to be involved in frontline fighting, but rather may be engaged in non-boots-on-the-ground tasks.

A possible presence of NATO ground troops could take many forms to assist Ukrainians, from [medical assistance to technical support](#). As Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation [Antonio Tajani](#) pointed out, "*We are not at war with Russia. We are defending Ukraine, which is something completely different*". Macron's message was meant to simply refer to the fact that Europe must be ready to support Ukraine in the long run and it is necessary to remain open to examining ways to deepen this support. Meanwhile, Putin's warnings are a stark reminder of the risks inherent in escalating tensions between Russia and the West. Despite calls for peace talks, Russia's actions, including the attack on Avdiivka, suggest a readiness to assert Russian interests forcefully, further heightening tensions.

In conclusion, officially, both the French and German governments have stated that as of today, no European troops are to be stationed in Ukraine. In this regard, if any German, or French, or other EU country's military personnel were to be located in Ukraine in the future, it would be solely for technical-logistical support roles, and far away from the front line –precisely to avoid the risk of escalation in the event of the death of some European soldier. This very argument is supported by the conversations between German soldiers, which were [intercepted](#) by Russian intelligence services. In any case, it remains very unlikely that Germany and France would expose themselves to such a risk for two main reasons. First, it is incredibly risky from a diplomatic point of view because it moves the possibility of dialogue even further away. Second, it is not essential. In fact, it is believed that the two countries in question will continue to call Ukrainian soldiers back to EU territory to proceed with training and technical preparation, without the need to place their own military personnel on Ukrainian territory.