

Deploying European Forces -but Not NATO- to Ukraine, “Should not be Ruled Out”. Macron’s Call

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The “taboo” about Europe sending troops to Ukraine “has been broken”. Proposing that would be “inconceivable” a few months ago, but French President Emmanuel Macron paved the way to bringing this scenario to the table when he said, on February 26, that deploying European forces to the Slavic country should not be “ruled out”. Thus argue Alex Crowther (Retired US Colonel), Jahara Matisek (Military Professor at the U.S. Naval War College), and Phillips P. O’Brien (Head of the School of International Relations at the University of St. Andrews), in their recent Foreign Affairs [piece](#). There have been mixed messages on Ukraine from Western leaders; what is going on?

Europe—but Not NATO—Should Send Troops to Ukraine

To Halt Russia’s Advance, Kyiv Needs More Boots on the Ground

By [Alex Crowther](#), [Jahara Matisek](#), and [Phillips P. O’Brien](#) April 22, 2024

Screenshot from [Foreign Affairs](#)

Last month I [wrote](#) on how Macron’s increasingly bellicose (albeit ambiguous) rhetoric was, at first, immediately countered by other NATO leaders, such as German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and others, as well as, across the Atlantic, US President John Biden.

The tide could be turning: thus far, the Finnish defense minister and the Polish foreign

minister have echoed Macron's call by suggesting their forces could be deployed to Ukraine too – it has a lot to do with “flexing muscle”, preparing, that is, for a Trump presidency scenario.

Despite so much European panic over a new Trump inauguration and his [supposed promise](#) to “never come to help” Europe, the truth is that the Republican's “isolationism” can only go so far – as is the case of any American president in the context of the US so called “[double government](#)” system, as Tufts University political scientist Michael J. Glennon describes it (some word it more ungenerously by bluntly calling it a “[secret government](#)”). Trump's own record speaks volumes against any notion of him being an “isolationist” in any sense – one just needs to ask the [Venezuelans](#), or the [Iranians](#), for that matter.

Similarly, it would be quite unwise to bet on France's (or Germany, for that matter) flirtation with “[strategic autonomy](#)”, the European version of [non-alignmentism](#). To put it simply, European powers, France included, are way too intertwined within NATO's structures to go too far away from it.

Speaking of the Atlantic Alliance, the provisions on its [Article 5](#) (which is [the very core](#) of the pact) are still binding. It states:

“the Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all... if such an armed attack occurs, each of them... will assist the Party or Parties so attacked... to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area.”

In a Schrödinger's cat kind of reasoning, Crowther, Matisek, and O'Brien argue in the aforementioned [piece](#) that in the scenario they propose, “European forces would be acting outside the NATO framework and NATO territory”, and therefore “any casualties would not trigger an Article 5 response and draw in the United States”. After all, they add, “Russia's opponent would not be NATO but a coalition of European countries seeking to balance against naked Russian imperialism”. One can clearly see the cat's tail here: it is basically a coalition of NATO members which, however, is not NATO. I am not sure Moscow (or anybody) would buy that.

Again, article 5 wording specifically mentions “an armed attack” against any NATO member taking place “in Europe or North America”, while article 6 further specifies, for the purpose of article 5, that this includes any attack “on the forces, vessels, or aircraft of any of the Parties, when in or over these territories or any other area in Europe in which occupation forces of any of the Parties were stationed on the date when the Treaty entered into force or the Mediterranean Sea or the North Atlantic area north of the Tropic of Cancer.”

In any case, a little bit of political and legal (not to mention military) realism can be refreshing sometimes. Legal technicalities apart, from a Western perspective, if Europe sends troops to the combat zone in Ukraine and Russia retaliates by attacking European targets while the US just watches it and does nothing, then NATO is pointless. It would undermine the Atlantic Alliance credibility and *raison d'être* forever.

Washington has been, time and time again, showing itself quite willing to fight “to the last Ukrainian” – as in the dark humor joke which Biden almost [paraphrased](#) in a [statement](#) back in December 2022. If one looks at the *modus operandi* of the US-led West, the last years have largely been about the proxification of conflicts, be it by employing irregular forces

(and even [terrorist groups](#)) as “proxies” or by trying to do so with allied sovereign nations: arguably such is the case in [Ukraine](#) and also [Israel](#). Proxifying Europe itself would be a long shot, though.

One may agree or disagree with the ongoing Russian military operations taking place on Ukrainian soil since 2022, and notwithstanding any valid criticism one may, it would be unwise to deny the role [NATO expansion](#) had in causing and [aggravating this crisis](#). The point is: if Moscow decision in February 24, 2022 was met with surprise by many in the West, the consequences of sending European troops to the battlefield could surpass any calculation and bring about a point of no return no one desires – and yet, for some reason, to paraphrase [Borell](#) (and Nietzsche), Western leaders have been [dancing on the edge of the abyss](#) for too long now.

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