

## Does ‘Little Napoleon’ Macron Want to Lead Europe into War with Russia?

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France wants to go to war with Russia, or so it seems. Perhaps the French President Emmanuel Macron imagines himself Napoleon reincarnated in his determination to make the continent a *Weltmacht*. Macron recently insisted that Europeans “should not exclude that there might be a need for security that then justifies some elements of [military] deployment.” Indeed, not only did he argue that “nothing should be ruled out,” but he added, “We will do anything we can to prevent Russia from winning this war.”

The most important NATO members, led by Washington, rejected his suggestion. Nevertheless, Macron, whose bombast contrasts sharply with his government’s miserly contribution of about a billion dollars to Ukraine, doubled down, receiving support from allies at the other end of the military spectrum, including Czechia, Estonia, and Lithuania. For instance, the prime minister of Estonia, with all of 7,200 men and women under arms, insisted that “everything is on the table to help Ukraine beat Putin.” As in the past, NATO states with the least military capabilities seemed most ready to proffer grandiose plans for using other members’ militaries.

The U.S. and several NATO allies already are deeply involved in the proxy war-plus against Moscow. Providing a plethora of weapons to kill thousands of Russians is provocative enough. In the past, both Washington and Moscow played the game—Afghanistan and Vietnam, respectively, come to mind. Yet in neither case were the neo-belligerents so public about their direct involvement and ostentatious in their celebration of the deadly results.

To start, many foreigners fighting with Ukraine against Russia are unofficially deployed. Explained former Pentagon official Stephen Bryen, “Now the Russians are saying that many of the so-called ‘mercenaries’ in Ukraine are, in fact, highly trained NATO soldiers. They wear Ukrainian uniforms with national patches identifying them. They are ‘necessary’ to operate the high tech weapons NATO has sent to Ukraine. When the Russians recently took over Avdiivka they found bodies of these mercenaries, some American and some Poles.”

A few weeks ago, Russia claimed to have killed French combatants in an airstrike. Paris called the report “disinformation,” but its denial was widely disbelieved, especially now. Added Bryen, “Most of the deaths of NATO personnel are covered up. When they are reported at all, they generally say that the ‘volunteer’ was providing medical assistance.”

Other allied forces operate more openly. German Chancellor Scholz revealed that both France and the United Kingdom had troops assisting in the use of high-tech weapons transferred to

Kiev. Observed Scholz: “What the British and French are doing in terms of target control and support for target control cannot be done in Germany.”

The UK admitted the truth, criticizing Scholz only for leaking the information. London has assisted Ukraine in destroying Russian war ships. Moreover, international affairs specialist Michael Brenner explained, the UK’s “specialized personnel have been operating the Storm Shadow missiles (counterpart to the French SCALP) employed against Crimea and elsewhere. MI-6 has taken a lead role in designing multiple attacks on the Kerch Bridge and other critical infrastructure.” Rumors circulated that British personnel were assisting with the air defense unit which downed a Russian plane carrying Ukrainian POWs.

Such activities are widespread. Le Monde reported, “Since the outbreak of the invasion of Ukraine, numerous state actors associated with Western intelligence services, often with military status, have been present in the country. Undercover diplomatic personnel, advisers for Ukraine, and members of special forces have inherently played a role since the start of the war.”

Macron’s proposal to escalate the conflict triggered an allied war of words. He suggested that his critics were craven weaklings: “We are surely approaching a moment for Europe in which it will be necessary not to be cowards.” His government was reportedly considering sending Special Forces to aid Ukraine in its air defense operations.

The U.S. also has personnel on the ground in a training role and more. Two German generals whose conversation was tapped by Russia observed that “we know that many people with American accents in civil clothing are running around there.” Apparently, a lot of them. Explained Brenner:

Roughly 4–5,000 Americans have been performing critical operational functions from the outset. The presence of a majority predates by several years the onset of hostilities 2 years ago. That contingent was augmented by a supplementary group of 1,700 last summer which was as a corps of logistic experts advertised as mandated to seek out and eradicate corruption in the black-marketing of pilfered supplies. The Pentagon people are sown thought the Ukrainian military from headquarters planning units, to advisers in the field, to technicians and Special Forces. It is widely understood that Americans have operated the sophisticated HIMARS long-range artillery and the Patriot air defense batteries. This last means that members of the U.S. military have been aiming—perhaps pulling the trigger on—weapons that kill Russians.

The CIA also has played an active role in Ukraine’s defense:

CIA officers remained at a remote location in western Ukraine when the Biden administration evacuated U.S. personnel in the weeks before Russia invaded in February 2022. During the invasion, the officers relayed critical intelligence, including where Russia was planning strikes and which weapons systems they would use. “Without them, there would have been no way for us to resist the Russians, or to beat them,” said Ivan Bakanov, who was then head of Ukraine’s domestic intelligence agency, the S.B.U.

U.S. officials anonymously but publicly took credit for killing Russian generals and sinking Russian ships. Washington is one of the prime suspects in the attack on the Russo-German Nord Stream 2 pipeline.

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg encouraged escalation too, arguing that “it will be up to each ally to decide whether to deliver F-16 fighter jets to Ukraine, but the country has the right to self-defense, including striking legitimate Russian military targets outside Ukraine.” The issue is not just the range of the planes, but who would fly them. Moscow assumes NATO would also provide pilots, however unlikely that might seem to Americans. But then, Russians flew planes on behalf of North Korea against the U.S. and Egypt against Israel.

Some Ukraine partisans would push the boundary of potential *casus belli* outward. Foreign troops could play a variety of non-combat roles in Ukraine, but all would risk drawing NATO into the fray. Paris admitted that one purpose of introducing troops would be the hope that the “presence of French soldiers or [those] of other nations would potentially protect certain areas of the Ukrainian territory.” That is, the French military operating in a war zone would become a human shield behind which Ukraine could freely attack Russia while avoiding retaliation. Rather like President Woodrow Wilson’s ludicrous claim that one American on board immunized a British reserve cruiser carrying munitions through a war zone, one French soldier in Kiev, Odessa, or Kharkiv would immunize an entire city from attack. That would be ridiculous, of course, with French soldiers choosing to enter a war zone. However, Paris already has complained to Moscow about killing its citizens in Ukraine.

The hawkish former Rep. Adam Kinzinger would turn this doctrine into U.S. policy, contending that, with a missile strike some 500 feet away from Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and visiting Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis in Odessa, “Russia just got within 150 meters of an article 5, with news of the strike in Odessa almost hitting the Greek Prime Minister.” Even more so, presumably, he would expect America to go to war if a U.S. politician grandstanding with Zelensky in Kiev or U.S. soldiers training Ukrainians elsewhere perished in a Russian strike.

Why the widespread enthusiasm for lighting the fires of what could become a nuclear World War III?

In an odd sense, we are paying a price for the fact that Putin has failed to escalate. Washington and its allies began cautiously, hesitant to act as Ukraine’s armorer. However, as Putin ignored military provocations, NATO governments unleashed a deadly munitions cascade, costing the lives of thousands, and perhaps tens of thousands, of Russian personnel. So far, despite sharp criticism from the nationalist right, Putin has rejected escalation. France’s foreign minister now confidently insists that the allies can send troops “without crossing the threshold of belligerence.”

In similar circumstances, would Washington be as restrained as Russia has been? Four years ago candidate Joe Biden said what many Americans were thinking: “I don’t understand why this president is unwilling to take on Putin when he’s actually paying bounties to kill American soldiers in Afghanistan.” That story wasn’t true, but Washington was filled with demands for

retaliation. Imagine if Moscow had emptied its armories and shipped everything to the Taliban, provided missiles to strike U.S. territory, sent personnel to Afghanistan to operate Russian weapons, ran intelligence operations for the insurgents, and openly debated introducing Russian troops to aid the Taliban. Washington would do *something*, and probably a lot, in response.

In this regard, Western states have benefited from Putin's apparent belief that Russia is winning, so presumably he refuses to risk widening the war. (The invasion has been costly, but he evidently believes that he will nevertheless achieve his objectives.) Yet the allies say they are determined to prevent Moscow from triumphing. Some insist that sufficient support be rendered to ensure Ukraine can negotiate a favorable peace. Others, like Macron, talk of producing a Ukrainian victory. All of Kiev's friends hope to expose Putin's ambitions as folly.

Ukraine's future obviously is an existential interest for Ukrainians, but is not, despite the florid rhetoric on both sides of the Atlantic, for Americans or Europeans. Indeed, popular support for Ukraine on both sides of the Atlantic is thin and declining. As time passes, this drop is likely to accelerate.

In contrast, the Russian government and its nationalist backers also see Ukraine's status as an existential interest. So in all likelihood does Putin, in assessing both his historical reputation and, more immediately, his political survival. If the allies openly join the battle or enable systematic attacks on Moscow and other major Russian cities, serious threats against Crimea, or virtual destruction of Russian military units, Moscow's relative quiescence is unlikely to continue. For Putin, defeat truly is not an option. And given the Russian military's lower threshold for use of nuclear weapons, the consequences could be dire for all.

Allied aid has helped the Ukrainian people preserve their independence from Moscow's assault. Yet the Napoleon-wannabe Macron talks of defeating Russia. That is a fool's errand likely to result in a broader and more destructive conflict. Instead, Washington and Brussels should concentrate on bringing the conflict to a peaceful end.

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