

# Is Macron pushing the EU to rethink Nato leadership in Ukraine war?

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- A dragged-out war, a boon for the US, will leave Europe drained and weaker as a geopolitical player
- In suggesting Western troops in Ukraine, Macron has shone a spotlight on the unviability of Nato's strategy



The European Union has struggled to be seen as an independent player amid big power rivalry, not least because of its partnership with the US-dominated Nato. French President Emmanuel Macron, a champion for strategic autonomy, sparked controversy last year when he declared that being an US ally did not mean being a “follower” or a “vassal”.

Now, Macron has raised the possibility of a “strategic surge” of Western troops in Ukraine to repel the Russian invasion, urging Ukraine's allies not to be “cowards”. This has alarmed Europe and Nato countries, including the US, which strongly resists direct military involvement in the war.

“There are no American soldiers at war in Ukraine. And I am determined to keep it that way,” said US President Joe Biden, even as he vowed America “will not walk away”. Nato

countries including Britain and Germany have also ruled out sending troops, with German Defence Minister Boris Pistorius dismissing Macron's suggestion as unhelpful.

Macron has stood his ground, however, insisting that "every one of the words that I say on this issue is weighed, thought through and measured".

Many have reacted to Macron's words with disbelief, given the [unthinkable risks](#) of an escalation of war. Some have downplayed his words, with French officials referring to activities such as demining and arms production which might make Nato's presence in Ukraine necessary, and talking up the idea of creating "[strategic ambiguity](#)".

All this misses the point, in my opinion. With Ukraine's [Avdiivka falling](#) last month in a major Russian victory, Washington and its fellow Nato allies face the idea that Ukraine's goal of regaining all its territory is becoming an unrealistic prospect.

Even Pope Francis, the spiritual head of the world's 1.4 billion Catholics, has called for Ukraine to show the "[courage of the white flag](#)" in an appeal for peace negotiations.

Washington does not seem to mind the war dragging on; earlier this month, US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin admitted it had been a boon for the US economy. For the US, the defence of democracy against autocratic forces is an ideological battle it will not back down on. And as CIA director William Burns recently made clear, US support for Ukraine is a show of deterrence for China against taking Taiwan by force.

For Europe, however, the war has clearly been a bane. Where will a dragged-out Ukraine war leave the EU? The bloc's economy is in danger of bleeding out, especially as Germany, its powerhouse, is also wrestling with [soaring energy costs](#), having been forced to hastily re-secure its oil and gas after years of dependence on Russian supplies.

Macron's dream of [European strategic autonomy](#) remains a mirage as long as Nato, under America's leadership, decides the transatlantic alliance's support for Ukraine and therefore the pace of the war. Furthermore, letting the situation drag itself out could entail a prospect even more ominous.

As Europe is mired in a battleground year after year, and as China continues to stand and grow against America's attempt to outcompete it, who can guarantee Washington will not change tack and switch to the [G2 scenario](#) it once flirted with? In that case, the two superpowers could eventually join hands and prey on a Europe that, while collectively sizeable and wealthy, is divided and impotent.

It is from this perspective that one can perhaps guess at the true intentions behind Macron's recent comments. If nothing else, his words shattered an atmosphere of political correctness. In raising a controversial scenario, he has pushed his American and European allies to the extreme, shining a light on the deficiency and unviability of Nato's strategy over the Ukraine war.

If so, Macron may have presented Washington with a checkmate. America may have taken for granted its leadership in Nato and its European allies' submission to its will because of their alleged shared values. It might have realised that defeating the Russians on the battlefield has become an impossibility but that they have to go on with it nevertheless.

The retirement this month of US diplomat Victoria Nuland, a staunch Ukraine supporter, as the undersecretary of state for political affairs, may be the beginning of an end.

A different signal can be read from Macron's words: that the dragging on of the Ukraine war is not bearable and the European wound has to cease festering; that if Washington cannot do it, it should leave the Europeans themselves to sort it out with the Russians; that eventually Europe must stand up and be counted as an independent geopolitical player, with Russia (and even Britain) returning to the fold.

Macron's timing is about right. Russia's response to Macron's words has been to dismiss them while also warning of the dangerous consequences of Nato's direct involvement. Washington, as the incumbent superpower, is dutifully playing hardball in its avowed competition with China, knowing that war is not an option given China's military prowess. It knows Israel is its Achilles' heel but has no choice but to keep muddling through in the [Gaza conflict](#), whatever it takes.

Only in Europe does the US still enjoy considerable leverage in playing its allies off against Russia. Macron, and those European elites who think like him, appear to be taking action to upend this situation for Europe's sake.

If they succeed, the world will be buttressed by G3, not G2, and 2024 may well be the year in which Europe rises again in the tapestry of global geopolitical history.

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