

Between Sovereignty and Solidarity: The European Left's Dilemma on Ukraine and Military Power

On the weird Gaullist Turn and the Future of the Left in Europe.

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Since Trump's election—and especially after the U.S. cut military aid to Ukraine—a growing chorus in Europe has called for the continent to become more militarily “independent.” This idea, often associated with the legacy of Charles de Gaulle, emphasizes strategic autonomy from the U.S. and NATO. While traditionally a stance of the French right, this vision has now gained traction across the political spectrum, including parts of the left. Critics argue that Europe and Zelensky have been too reliant on American security guarantees, and some even claim Zelensky should never have engaged with the Trump administration.

However, these calls for European self-reliance risk becoming detached from the immediate reality: Ukraine is fighting an existential war against Russian imperialism. While some European leaders frame military buildup as a question of power politics, the left must define its position differently—not by mirroring right-wing nationalism, but by standing firmly for international solidarity. The key challenge is to support Ukraine's resistance without falling into the logic of militarized blocs or neo-imperialist ambitions. Can the European left develop a strategy that rejects both great-power rivalry and isolationist nationalism? The answer will shape not only Ukraine's future but also the broader struggle for democracy and self-determination worldwide.

Since Trump's election and even more since the American withdrawal of military aid to Ukraine, we have been hearing growing Gaullist discourse on the necessary “independence” of Europe, including from the left. Europe and Zelensky are supposedly responsible for having relied too much on American security. I have even read from some leftists that Zelensky should not have negotiated with the Trump administration. As is often the case with sovereigntist discourse, there are many fantasies of omnipotence in such statements.

Faced with a pro-Trump European far-right (including the VLD which is now eyeing Musk's side), we have a campist far-left living in complete denial of the war and speaking about peace in Ukraine in the same terms as the Trump administration (in the case of the Belgian Workers Party (PTB), this reflects an alignment with China).

Between pro-Russian discourse denying reality and European liberal discourse on the rearmament of Europe as a power, the European left is searching for itself. It seems to me that we must be able to separate the question of the victory of Ukrainian resistance from that of European rearmament. Right now, for all democratic leftists, it is about winning the war in Ukraine, against Putin, against Xi Jinping, against Trump. It is for this precise reason that Zelensky must be supported in refusing a "ceasefire" without security guarantees. More fundamentally, winning the war in Ukraine, following the victorious Syrian uprising, would first put a stop to Russian imperialism that has been expanding since at least the Second Chechen War (1999). Europe should not rearm itself at Ukraine's expense in an abstract way; it must take part in the national independence war in Ukraine, in order to drive Russian armed forces out of Ukraine, with international law and UN conventions as the sole compass.

In a way, here, the European left could remain Leninist. It is indeed about transforming the imperialist war into a revolutionary war. With the reversal of transatlantic alliances under the mafia-like Trump regime, now aligned with the Kremlin, the historical mission of the left appears with complete clarity. The Ukrainian independence war can and must be transformed into a war against the oligarchs, against the plutocrats, against rentier capital and its mafia-like logic. An anti-imperialist war, for the right to self-determination and against the peace of empires, that of business as usual. This revolutionary transformation will only be possible if the European left refuses the current Gaullist liberal framework. It is not about increasing spending budgets to create an imaginary European power; it is about resolutely engaging in the Ukraine war to defeat Russian and American imperialism. Against the powers of the coalesced Holy Empire and for the right of peoples to self-determination.

Completely contrary to neo-chauvinisms, whether decolonial or Gaullist, the left must open the framework, the perspective, on a global scale. It is not true that Europe finds itself alone facing its destiny. All over the world, peoples are fighting against the kleptocratic regimes that govern them. The victorious uprising in Syria paved the way. The perspective can take the names of HIRAK, Maidan or Occupy Wall Street. The Greek people still took to the streets a few days ago, by the thousands, against the criminal effects of austerity policies on public services. We were 100,000 in the streets of Brussels against our [new federal multi-party] 'Arizona' government.

One of the reasons why conspiracy theories "Made in Putin" circulate, flowing almost like in a pipeline into the brains of campists is because, for a good part of Western European public opinion that lives under the umbrella of NATO immunity, the war in Ukraine remains unreadable and distant.

However, the latest sequence, with Zelensky's refusal to yield to Vance and Trump's threats, completely changes the political nature of this war. Zelensky, who was mocked as a clown, as a puppet statesman, etc., now appears as the one who stood up to the allied American and Russian Empires. The Ukraine war then becomes an anti-imperialist war. Europe should not arm itself, behind NATO and Schengen borders, in a purely imperialist immune reflex and in the perspective of an empire-to-empire confrontation. It must resolutely engage with Ukraine so that Ukraine can preserve its territorial integrity, to enforce international law, within the UN framework. From this point of view, the vote at the General Assembly on the resolution to "promote a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in Ukraine" offers an extremely precise map of democracy's enemy: Hungary, Israel, Russia, United States, North Korea and the countries under their influence. This fascist bloc is far from being the majority.

Against the fascists, against the neo-chauvinists, against the Gaullists, we will remain internationalists.

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