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France's unflinching support under economic influence

Introduction

Historically, France has been considered the first modern democracy and has made European sovereignty its watchword. A staunch defender of its principles, France has intervened in the world, through all channels, to defend its principles. For the West, Ukraine is the vanguard of democracy and freedom, and it is therefore imperative to defend Ukraine against Russia.

Until the war, the international fight against terrorism was far from the French and European borders. Now, Russian territorial claims are at the doors of the European Union and NATO. Moreover, the threats are no longer the same, the traditional guerrilla warfare of recent conflicts has given way to a high-intensity war between two actors.

Despite the initial desire for appeasement through dialogue, France tried to set itself up as a mediator in the early days of the conflict. At that time, the goal was to maintain contact with Vladimir Putin in order to try to create conditions for future negotiations. However, the determination and inflexibility of the Kremlin did not allow the Élysée to dissuade him from this act.

This was a complicated position for France, which had bilateral relations with Ukraine and Russia. In 2014, Russia's invasion of Crimea complicated the relationship with France. Nevertheless, despite a violation of international law, Moscow remained a major economic partner for Paris. In fact, Russia has more than 500

French companies on its territory in key areas, including agribusiness, finance, distribution, energy, automotive, construction, transport, aerospace, and pharmaceuticals,¹ and is a major energy partner for France.

Moreover, diplomatic relations between France and Ukraine were born in 1992 together with Ukraine's independence but have become more dynamic since 2014. Bilateral relations between the two states are based on economic projects, making France the 10th world supplier to Ukraine and the 4th European supplier. French investments make France the 6th investor in the country. 160 French companies are established in Ukraine and employ approximately 30,000 people, making France the leading international employer in Ukraine.² In terms of cultural diplomacy, France continues to develop its cooperation with Ukraine through student exchanges, French alliances, artistic festivals, twinning, etc.

Economic interests are thus holding back relations between France and Russia but also between France and Ukraine. This is why taking sides with one over the other was not the preferred scenario at first. We note that the dissuasion undertaken by Emmanuel Macron during the calls to the Russian president was futile, as France has now sided with the European Union and NATO, thus advocating multilateralism.

The strategy of multilateralism adopted by France

France is a country with a permanent seat on the UN Security Council thanks to a robust, credible, effective, and independent nuclear deterrent. Its role in international bodies is therefore crucial, making it possible to prevent a major war, to guarantee France's freedom of action and to preserve its vital interests which have a European and transatlantic dimension. France's nuclear deterrence thus contributes to security in Europe.

In 2022, during the French presidency of the Council of the European Union, France reiterated its desire for European defence and strategic autonomy. During the 6 months of its presidency, France put in place several actions in favour of Ukraine:

- reception of over 7.6 million Ukrainians,
- deployment of EUR 2 billion in military aid to support the Ukrainian army,
- EUR 2 billion to support the Ukrainian economy,
- granting EU candidate status to Ukraine,
- adoption of 6 sets of sanctions against Russia and Belarus.

¹ *Relations bilatérales Russie*, France Diplomatie, Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères, <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/dossiers-pays/russie/relations-bilaterales/> [accessed: 30 March 2023].

² *Ibidem*.

France is convinced that its partnerships and alliances are one of its main assets on the international scene, but also one of the targets intended to be weakened by its strategic competitors.³

The events in Ukraine were also an opportunity to reiterate its participation in NATO and its various partnerships. This multilateralism allows France to face the 'strategy of calling into question European security, of which the war against Ukraine on 24 February 2022 is the most open and brutal manifestation.'⁴

Nearly three years after President Emmanuel Macron said, '[w]hat we are experiencing is the brain death of NATO,' it would seem that the Elysée Palace has changed its view of the organisation in question. NATO now represents 'the foundation and essential framework for Europe's collective security.'⁵ Now modelled on the NATO vision, France is inflexible in its negotiations with Putin and supports Kiev with the ambition that it will return to its pre-2014 borders.

Humanitarian action implemented by France

In its National Strategic Review, France takes a clear position and states that 'the invasion of Ukraine by Russia on 24 February 2022 represents a strategic shift.' The consequences of this invasion encourage France to consolidate its alliances and modernise its defence tools.

According to the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, since 24 February 2022, France has shown full solidarity with the Ukrainians. Its position is firm towards the Russian authorities. Initially, France showed its unwavering support for Ukrainian people by setting up initiatives at the level of the State, citizens, and communities in favour of Ukrainian displaced persons by taking them in during the first months following the war.

At the International Conference 'Solidarity with Ukrainian People' on 13 December 2022, France pledged immediate support to help the Ukrainians through the winter. France and other participants present at the conference guaranteed the infrastructure resilience in 5 key sectors, including access to energy, access to water, agri-food, health care, and transport. In addition, France has committed to providing and transporting the necessary equipment and carrying out the associated maintenance work (repairs, spare parts). France has put in place a flexible and responsive coordination mechanism to adjust the aid provided in real time

³ *Revue nationale stratégique 2022*, Secrétariat Général de la Défense et de la Sécurité Nationale, pp. 25–97, Vie-publique.fr, https://medias.vie-publique.fr/data_storage_s3/rapport/pdf/287163.pdf [accessed: 30 March 2023].

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 9.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 14.

to the needs expressed by Ukraine. The international contribution collected at this conference amounts to more than EUR 1 billion.⁶

France is indeed a key humanitarian country, its humanitarian aid totalled, as of 23 February 2023, EUR 320 million according to the Kiel Institute for the World Economy.

French military support

French solidarity is demonstrated in many other ways, notably through a substantial military aid package of EUR 660 million.⁷ Still considered the 7th largest military power in the world and the largest military power in Europe, France's role in the conflict was predictable.

However, the military aid provided in relation to its GDP⁸ but also in relation to its military arsenal may call into question the unconditional support promised by France. Faced with the Russian army, which in 2022 had 850,000 soldiers and 250,000 reservists with a defence budget of USD 154 billion, the imbalance with Ukraine is total. One year later, the Ukrainian army is still holding out but is tired following repeated Russian offensives. The Russians, on the other hand, have a number of soldiers and are equipped with a powerful hybrid system with a substantial number of tanks, artillery, and small drones. Their industry provides a certain number of elements and replacements, which is not the case in Ukraine. This is why President Zelenskyy and his strategists are looking at all possible options and are closely examining the inventory of the allies: F-16, Mirage 2000, Rafale, CÆSAR, Leopard. In reality, France provides very little military equipment, Paris has already delivered 18 CÆSARs since the beginning of the conflict and still wants to deliver 12 others. France and its Allies wanted to provide a single type of uniform equipment to facilitate maintenance and training. The uniformity of the equipment is taken into account in the negotiations to facilitate the training of the Ukrainian troops, confirmed General Paloméros.

The scope of the military aid provided does not live up to the expectations and the reality on the ground because of this fear of becoming a cobelligerent in the

⁶ *Conférence internationale « Solidaires du peuple ukrainien »*, France Diplomatie, Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères, <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/dossiers-pays/ukraine/guerre-en-ukraine-l-action-diplomatique-de-la-france/faire-face-a-l-urgence-humanitaire-et-economique-en-ukraine/article/conference-internationale-solidaires-du-peuple-ukrainien> [accessed: 19 March 2023].

⁷ *Ukraine Support Tracker – A Database of Military, Financial and Humanitarian Aid to Ukraine*, Kiel Institute for the World Economy, 2023, <https://www.ifw-kiel.de/topics/war-against-ukraine/ukraine-support-tracker/?cookieLevel=not-set> [accessed: 30 March 2023].

⁸ *Ibidem*.

conflict. If France sends fighter planes or long-range missiles, it becomes a cobelligerent by providing Ukraine with the means to strike in Russia, so France would be officially considered as an enemy of Russia and no longer just a supporter of Ukraine.

France, with its 200,000 soldiers and 35,000 reservists, can therefore only intervene by secondary means to help Ukraine, by providing aid that would only be considered as secondary support by the Russians. Considered as the first army in Europe, France's role is decisive, but cannot impinge on its own defence either, as its means are limited. Although since 2017, France has been reinvesting in its army in the face of the 'disruption of global balances.'⁹

A beneficial conflict for the French Defence Technology Industrial Base

Russia's invasion of Ukraine prompted France to consolidate its alliances and accelerate the modernisation of its defence apparatus while taking into consideration emerging threats without substituting for terrorism. France is aware that warfare has changed and is defined as hybrid and that it is now necessary to move to a war economy. The French Minister of the Armed Forces, Sébastien Lecornu, defines a war economy as 'producing more, faster, and at reasonable costs.'¹⁰

This strategy addresses several issues:

- continued support for Ukraine,
- supporting the French army model,
- strengthening France's export capacity,
- staying independent.

The first economic element stems from the support that France provides to Ukraine. Our defence tool is defined at a minimum in relation to our needs; it must now be supplied. France provides equipment which is now used, such as ammunition, guns, or drones, and which has a certain impact on our defence industry.

Minister Lecornu confirmed on 24 March 2023 that the first results arrived from our defence industry. Indeed, the Thales company will double its production of Ground Master radars. Nexter will double its production of CÆSAR howitzers. Delivery times have been reduced from 40 to 18 months. Concerning the production of Mistral missiles, MBDA will double the number to 40 units per month and will reduce the time to produce an Aster missile from 40 to 18 months.

⁹ *Revue nationale stratégique 2022, op. cit.*, p. 3.

¹⁰ *Armement: livrer rapidement est devenu central, prévient Sébastien Lecornu*, Les Echos, 24 March 2023, <https://www.lesechos.fr/industrie-services/air-defense/armement-livrer-rapidement-est-devenu-central-previent-sebastien-lecornu-1918701> [accessed: 30 March 2023].

According to the former Chief of Staff of the Air Force, General Paloméros,¹¹ in terms of ammunition, the Ukrainians are spending twice as many artillery shells as the allies are able to produce. The Ukrainians are almost out of ammunition, it is necessary for their allies to feed this chain. In the eyes of the French Defence Technology Industrial Base, this demand was a real opportunity, since it was more a problem of production tools than a problem of research and technology: France produced what already existed.

This situation is a perfect opportunity for France to revive its defence industry. Beyond the positive effects from the economic point of view, the war in Ukraine also has positive effects on France's influence in terms of defence. The military aid provided by France has enabled it to promote its defence industry: the CÆSAR, the Crotales (surface-to-air missile) and the BONUS shell. The aid highlights French know-how in its ability to supply high-level equipment. There is also intangible aid which brings a lot, but which remains difficult to measure: intelligence.

The opportunity for reconstruction in Ukraine

Every war brings destruction, and successive bombings by Russia have caused the destruction of infrastructure and residential buildings. The French Treasury estimates that 'in the Kiev region, 25,000 buildings have been damaged.'¹²

If France has considerable know-how in the field of Defence Technology Industrial Base, it also has know-how in the field of construction and public works and intends to take advantage of the destruction of Ukraine to highlight French know-how and position French companies that are leaders in their field to become involved in the reconstruction of Ukraine.

This project is a perfect follow-up to the Lugano conference on the reconstruction of Ukraine that took place in early July 2022. Ukrainian officials and their allies discussed the general principles of reconstruction, with a new USD 100 billion fund proposed by the European Investment Bank. The UK and Switzerland have also announced new bilateral aid, but with conditions such as the fight against corruption and the implementation of economic and social reforms. Western donors insist that the investments should not be free and that the necessary reforms to Ukraine's institutions are essential. The Lugano conference was also an opportunity

¹¹ General Jean Paul Paloméros is a French Air Force general who was Chief of Staff of the French Air Force from 2009 to 2012 and Commander of NATO's Allied Command Transformation from 2012 to 2015. He has since been regularly called upon by the French media, notably to talk about the war in Ukraine.

¹² *Lancement d'un FASEP pour aider la reconstruction de l'Ukraine en favorisant l'économie circulaire*, Direction générale du Trésor, 28 September 2022, <https://www.tresor.economie.gouv.fr/Articles/2022/09/28/lancement-d-un-fasep-pour-aider-la-reconstruction-de-l-ukraine-en-favorisant-l-economie-circulaire> [accessed: 30 March 2023].

for Europeans to clarify the reforms needed for Ukraine's accession to the European Union. Reconstruction in Ukraine must be structural and decentralised, with European institutions joining forces with similar institutions on the Ukrainian side to support reconstruction.

Ukraine thus seems to be the right place for France to set up its *Fonds d'études et d'aide au secteur privé* (FASEP), which is a grant to 'finance feasibility studies or the demonstration of innovative green technologies.'¹³ This process takes place upstream of an infrastructure project.

From the French point of view, demonstrating French companies' efficiency in Ukraine would be a support mechanism for their internationalization. Based on a circular economy, France promises to reduce the costs and duration of reconstruction while valorising local waste materials. The aim is to then extrapolate this know-how to all buildings in the Kiev region and the rest of the country.

For example, the French company *Néo-Eco* aims for a world without waste and thus offers a recovery solution for all used materials while promoting a circular economy. Its main mission is to improve the profitability and credibility of its customers while reconciling the economy and the environment.¹⁴

The company is offering the following project to Hostomel: transform the materials from the deconstruction of weakened buildings into future raw materials for reconstruction. This project is therefore perfectly in line with the Kiev regional administration which considers it necessary to destroy 20% of structurally unstable buildings unusable because of the war. All this deconstruction before reconstruction may result in generating millions of tons of waste that will have to be disposed of.

This project is a 'French reference in the Ukrainian construction sector, demonstrating the ability of French companies to create innovative solutions and circular economy loops aimed at accelerating reconstruction efforts for the population by making use of immediately available resources.'¹⁵

The consequences of the war

For now, the support of European and NATO countries has saved the idea of a sovereign, free and democratic Ukraine. The outcome of this war now depends on Ukraine's willingness to restore its full sovereignty over its territory and its original borders as authorised by the UN Charter.

¹³ *Le FASEP*, Direction générale du Trésor, <https://www.tresor.economie.gouv.fr/services-aux-entreprises/le-fasep> [accessed: 30 March 2023].

¹⁴ *Une équipe en place pour la reconstruction de l'Ukraine !*, Neo-Eco, 13 October 2022, <https://www.neo-eco.fr/post/une-équipe-en-place-pour-la-reconstruction-de-l-ukraine> [accessed: 24 March 2023].

¹⁵ *Le FASEP*, *op. cit.*

According to General Paloméros,¹⁶ Russia's presence as a permanent member of the UN Security Council paralyzes a potential settlement of the dispute, as Russia blocks all decisions contrary to its own interests. The only security guarantee left is NATO. This hypothesis will inevitably be on the negotiating table, since Ukraine will not resign the Budapest Memorandum whose meaning is no longer valid.

Russia is a great power, and it is possible that the conflict will end either by force of arms or by political will to partition Ukraine. If Ukraine gets away with a partition with the Donbas and Crimea, it will be fine, but it is possible that the situation might go further in Russia's favour. The other option would be for one side to win, but most likely it would be the Russians and that is not desirable. To ensure Ukrainian victory, even more equipment would have to be provided for as long as it takes, according to some US military leaders.

Former director of the IRSEM, Frédéric Charillon, believes that this conflict will be long. The fact that this conflict pits a nuclear power against a small power makes it impossible for Russia to lose even if it is weakened on the ground. The war could end up being a war of attrition waged by Russia at the expense of Ukraine, with the bombing of infrastructure vital for the country. A war of attrition might result in losing Western support and this would be the ideal scenario for the Kremlin. This is how the Deputy Chairman of the State Duma, Pyotr Tolstoy, states that: 'European solidarity brings deaths. Because of your help, the war has already lasted for a year.' It is true that if the West had not provided military supply, the war would be over today for lack of fighters and materials. The fact that the war is still continuing is fortunate for Ukraine, since the alternative would have been the loss of its sovereignty. Frédéric Charillon's analysis, which says that '[i]n the end, the multiplication of battles, of fronts, will end up costing Russia much more than it will demobilise the Western countries,'¹⁷ is perfectly in line with the fact that the union of European countries will not let Russia win this war 'completely.'

In the face of a war of attrition, there is another scenario envisaged by Charillon: that of escalation, according to which America supplies arms under the cover of NATO, which could incite the Kremlin to use nuclear weapons.

¹⁶ J.-P. Paloméros, *Impact de la guerre en Ukraine sur la Transformation de l'Alliance*, « Revue défense nationale » 2023, no. 857: « 24 février 2022, un an après... (1/2) », pp. 56–60.

¹⁷ C. Lopes, *Guerre en Ukraine : « La Russie est en train de perdre sur le terrain mais n'acceptera pas de perdre », l'analyse de Frédéric Charillon*, France 3 – Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes, 13 January 2023, <https://france3-regions.francetvinfo.fr/auvergne-rhone-alpes/puy-de-dome/clermont-ferrand/guerre-en-ukraine-la-russie-est-en-train-de-perdre-sur-le-terrain-mais-n-acceptera-pas-de-perdre-2693018.html> [accessed: 22 March 2023].

Conclusions

This high-intensity war led by Russia mobilises France, which positions itself behind American multilateralism. Geographically distant from Ukraine, France is minimally involved alongside Ukraine in order to avoid entering a conflict that does not concern it directly. Its commitment to NATO and the EU allows it to intervene indirectly in the conflict. The outcome of this war will have certain consequences for a new world order: a cold war with an iron curtain separating autocracies (Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Iran) from democracies. Guaranteeing the security of this new world order will be the key to any negotiations, but everything depends also on the future Ukrainian offensive in the spring. Ukraine has taken advantage of the last few months to recreate a dozen brigades and to recover a sufficient amount of equipment to launch a major counter-offensive to recover its lost territories. Depending on the outcome of this offensive, France's position may have to evolve because if Ukraine fails, it will be forced to negotiate ending the war with the Russians. France's position could then evolve from a firm stance against Russia to an open position to place itself at the centre of future negotiations between the two countries.

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Abstract

France has always prioritized firmness, dialogue, and solidarity in its relationship with Ukraine. In response to the conflict, France has taken on the role of a mediator, engaging in dialogue with the Russian leader in an attempt to discourage further aggression. Despite criticism from the international community, France has also provided military aid, including ammunition and cannons, as a demonstration of its expertise in armaments. Although the aid is minimal compared to its arsenal, France fears weakening and seeks to showcase its power. In addition, France has deployed personnel, including instructors for training purposes.

Demonstrating its commitment to solidarity, France has provided support in energy, food supply, water access, health care, and transport infrastructure to Ukraine, and reiterated its support at the international conference in December 2022. By contributing in these areas, France intends to play a valuable role in the post-war reconstruction of Ukraine, solidifying its position as a reliable partner in the process. Overall, France's commitment to Ukraine is clear, and its effective efforts are an indication of its intention to assist Ukraine in its time of need.

Keywords: solidarity, dialogue, minimal aid, weakening, reconstruction