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# Alone, divided and in denial, Europe needs Ukraine



Were a major European country other than Ukraine, let's say the UK or France, to be attacked tomorrow, what would the response be? European leaders would signal strong support and schedule a meeting for later in the week, where they'd vainly express trust in American intervention and resolve to gather again in a few days' time to see if there's anything else that can be done. In the meantime, London or Paris would be occupied or flattened.

Such is the sorry state of Europe right now. No number of firm statements, gatherings of leaders, or the bandying about of large sums of defence spending can hide the emptiness at the core. It's a failure that has been there consistently since Russia started its westward expansion in 2014.

Serious leadership would have recognised that for what it was and immediately built up European defences, especially after the first Trump election victory in 2016.

The failure to step up became even more egregious after Russia's 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine, when Europe acquiesced to a policy of fighting to the last Ukrainian, without giving the country realistic aid to end the war on equitable terms.

Now we're facing the consequences of these past failures, and it might be too late to avoid more serious long-term effects for the continent and the rest of the world. The war in Ukraine is not, as many Europeans still seem to think, a far-away conflict that has nothing to do with them.

## Does Europe have an alternative?

Whatever we might think of Ukraine as a country, its problems in terms of corruption, its history, and its politics, it has now become a place where the future shape of the new international order will be decided.

Should Ukraine come to fall under the new

Russo-American dispensation, Europe will be left vulnerable to threats and extortion, even more than it already is.

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Stopping the war and avoiding an even greater one are worthy goals, but these could be corrupted if the conditions are such that A: it's effectively a surrender that will eventually lead to subjugation. B: it will only lead to more, and eventually more deadly, conflict. And, of course, C: a better alternative exists that would avoid the above outcomes.

The latter is right now the most crucial question: does Europe have an alternative? Is there still time to craft a policy that will deter aggression in all spheres? In the technological, economic, political, and most urgently, the military sphere?

## Military dependence on the US

Europe, by the way, obviously includes the UK, not as some silly British headline writers sometimes put it, 'Europe and the UK'. At least, that would be the assumption, were it not for the particularly weak position that the UK finds itself in.

On paper, the UK still has one of the strongest European militaries, with, again on paper, its own nuclear deterrent. In reality, the British forces, including the nuclear deterrent, are more reliant on American support than almost any other major military in Europe.

Only the French can operate independently to a significant degree, including their nuclear arsenal.

This might explain Keir Starmer's desperation in **trying** to keep the US on board more than anything else. The degree of military dependence on the US could explain some of

the differences that are emerging among European leaders on how to proceed.

### NATO as an organisation will not function without the Americans

Apart from the UK, the significant Polish military is one of the most reliant on the US. Cue Donald Tusk, Poland's Prime Minister, despite his strong support for Ukraine, **saying** that Poland will not contribute troops to a potential EU 'reassurance force'. He knows his troops will be too exposed without American backing.

NATO as an organisation will not function without the Americans, and so we see NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte, who, as a politician, was not noted for having a backbone, trying very hard to keep the US onboard.

The positions of Starmer, Rutte and Tusk, among others, are understandable given the lack of options they have right now. We don't want to send an expeditionary force into Ukraine, only to have another Dunkirk on our hands when it's unable to deter the enemy.

Starmer's **proposal** for such a force is, as he has said, predicated on US backing. Now that it's clear this is not forthcoming, the UK is effectively out of the game.

## Division between EU members and the European Commission

One of the divisions at the moment in Europe is between those who can see that there must be action independent of the US and those who are still reluctant to contemplate such a course.

Another division is emerging between some EU member countries and the European Commission, with Commission President Ursula von der Leyen being accused of attempting a power grab over defence and defence procurement.

Just like we have to set aside our exact opinion of Ukraine, we might also have to suspend often justified criticism of Von der Leyen. She supposedly acted overbearingly in procuring corona vaccines, but it did get the job done. Now, we need similar resolve to crash through barriers.

### It can take years before Europe can stand on its own, even if it now unites and decides to act

The speed at which the Trump administration is moving in withdrawing support for Ukraine and Europe is clearly intended not to give the Europeans many options. It can take years before Europe can stand on its own, even if it now unites and decides to act.

Hence the scenario sketched in the opening paragraph: What would Europe do if a 'core country' were now attacked? Leaders gathering these days to figure out a next step should react as if this were the case.

## Existential question

The animosity towards at the very least the European Union, if not to the idea of European power in general, is deep-seated in the current ruling circles in Moscow and Washington DC. Europeans should understand this is not a hollow threat, nor one they can appease.

The European political discourse on current developments in the US and Russia often disguises what's really going on. Take the latter, other than the American president, European leaders don't hesitate calling the Russian regime dictatorial, yet we often ignore what this really means: murderous.



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We don't just have to look at Ukraine and other hotspots for that but also at the many opponents of the Kremlin that have been killed, poisoned, suicided, etc. Sometimes while taking refuge in European countries.

Is that the kind of regime we'd like to be exposed to, or even worse, be subordinate to? Seen in that light, the current situation becomes an existential question, just like an attack on an EU country would be.

Not doing enough in response will very likely either lead to more conflict or significant loss of autonomy. Deciding to act will also come with a price, in terms of the economy and maybe even in lives.

For those who despair and believe that Europe is powerless to act on its own against Russia, there is one answer: Look at what Ukraine did when it was invaded, how it stopped and reversed the Russian advance. Nobody had thought this possible.

Instead of acquiescing to the dismantling of the Ukrainian state and army that achieved this, Europe would do better to use that strength and integrate it into its defences. Immediate EU membership for Ukraine, however implausible, might be the best first step to achieve this quickly.