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Ukraine

War or peace? A false dilemma in the controversy

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War or peace? A false dilemma in the controversy surrounding the Ukrainian question

In the absence of conditions for negotiations, talk of an immediate ceasefire as an alternative to military support is just empty words aimed at the French public in the electoral campaign. In the absence of other realistic options, concrete solidarity requires continued military aid to Ukraine.

I would like to take advantage of this invitation [\[1\]](#) to provide clarifications concerning the controversies of which Ukraine has been the subject for several weeks. The first controversy was sparked off by the European farmers' movement, over Ukraine's entry into the European Union. The second was triggered by Macron evoking the possibility of sending troops to Ukraine. In both cases, the Ukrainian question is used cynically by all political forces in a game of electoral rivalry. It is deployed using arguments disconnected from local reality, and has no other consequence than to undermine public support for the Ukrainian resistance. I will focus on the second controversy, because military support remains at the centre of the demands that Ukrainians address to Europeans.

Criticized by other European leaders and by the Secretary General of NATO, Macron's remarks were also immediately disavowed by the Ukrainian government, pointing out that in fact, Ukraine never requested the troops. It asks for weapons, and especially ammunition. On this level, whatever anyone says, France's contribution has so far remained relatively modest: according to French government figures, it amounts to 3.8 billion euros in 2 years, in a military budget whose expenditure exceeds 40 billion euros per year, or approximately 4 per cent of its total military expenditure. In reality, as a [recent survey by Mediapart shows](#), these figures are greatly inflated, with the real value of the aid being several times lower.

With his bluster about sending troops to Ukraine, Macron has not only failed to achieve his own goal in the competition for European leadership. These remarks gave fodder to all the political forces which have, in a more or less open manner, when the political situation has allowed it, opposed military support for Ukraine from the start: the National Rally, of course, but also the parties of the institutional left, such as the Communist Party and France Insoumise. It is clear that it is hand in hand that they are launching a new anti-Ukrainian campaign, concerning both Ukraine's entry into the European Union and the [bilateral security agreement](#) signed between France and Ukraine on 16 February. Worse, as we learned on Tuesday, while the far-right opted for abstention, the Communist Party and France Insoumise decided to vote against this security agreement. Let us look briefly at its content and on what France Insoumise offers instead.

What bothers France Insoumise are the assertions of principle that this document contains: "France reaffirms the objective of Ukraine's accession to the European Union" and "confirms that Ukraine's future accession to NATO would be a useful contribution to peace and stability in Europe." But if we look at this text concretely in detail, not only is there nothing about sending ground troops in the current phase of the war, but nothing of the sort is planned in a situation where Ukraine would be invaded again after a ceasefire or the signing of a peace agreement. Concretely, I quote: "In the event of future Russian armed aggression against Ukraine, [...] the French Participant will provide Ukraine with rapid and sustained assistance in terms of security, modern military equipment in all areas, according to needs, and economic assistance." The rest of the document details the content of this assistance, which includes training, cyber defence, weaponry, etc. Concretely, instead of proposing amendments, it is these minimum security guarantees, which do not differ in substance from those from which Ukraine currently benefits, that France Insoumise opposes. What does it suggest instead? In a [video published on 7 March](#), Mélenchon offers his vision of what he calls "the Ukraine-Russia conflict". According to him, "the only strategy that makes sense" is to put forward a "peace plan". To do this, it is said to be necessary to understand the nature of this "Ukraine-Russia conflict". I quote

Mélenchon: “The question of the war between Russians and Ukrainians involves two things: one, the borders [...] and two, mutual security. Ukrainians no longer want to live in fear of being invaded by the Russians. And the Russians no longer want to live in conditions where, according to what they say, they no longer want to be under the threat of NATO military intervention firstly, and secondly to see populations who have asked to be assimilated into the Russian federation, to be threatened.” To reach an agreement, it is necessary to organize a “conference on borders” where, I quote, we “ask the populations concerned what and to whom they want to be attached. The voice of the people is the solution, not the problem. [...] If these issues are settled by a referendum, then we have all the elements of peace.”

I will not dwell on this argument. I will simply remind you that this is not a Ukraine-Russia conflict over borders and mutual security, but a brutal, absolutely unjustified invasion and occupation of Ukrainian territories by the Russian army. That the threat from NATO and the alleged demand of Russian-speaking populations for military intervention to protect them from the Ukrainian government is pure Russian propaganda. That talking about referendums on the occupied territories is a despicable proposition, since Mr. Mélenchon knows very well that to organize them democratically is impossible. Russia has already organized a semblance of referendums on the occupied territories which gave more than 90 per cent of votes for annexation to Russia. How would we go about imposing on Russia the safe return of refugees so that they can vote, the departure of Russian settlers so that they cannot vote, and the supervision of these referendums by independent international bodies? It is completely irresponsible to make us believe that this is possible under current conditions.

Let us look at the situation realistically. Given the situation Ukraine currently finds itself in, it is reasonable to believe that a front-line ceasefire is the least bad option. Ukrainian troops are demoralized by the large number of those killed and wounded, the lack of ammunition and adequate equipment, etc. Ukrainian civilians, in turn, show little desire to replace those already at the front: after the failure of the summer counter-offensive, the demarcation line no longer moves in favour of Ukraine, and it is not retreating enough for those behind to once again feel an existential threat that would motivate them to volunteer, as was the case at the beginning. The tensions within Ukrainian society are very real. Everyone wants the war to end.

It is still necessary for the conditions for such a ceasefire be met, and first of all, that Putin has an interest in stopping the war and respecting the commitment of future non-aggression. However, this is precisely not the case : the Russian army has regained the initiative. The war allows the regime to strengthen itself inside the country, which has gone into “war economy” mode. The recent assassination of the oppositionist Alexey Navalny marks a new stage in political repression. The whole world was rightly moved to see thousands of anti-war Russians march and lay flowers in front of the his grave in Moscow. Unfortunately, despite the emotion and hope that this gesture gives rise to, there is nothing to immediately predict a popular uprising capable of changing something from within. The Putin regime now feeds on war, both internally and internationally, where its open objective is to use aggression against Ukraine to reshuffle the geopolitical balance of power. At the moment, it is difficult to imagine that anything less than a Ukrainian capitulation will satisfy it

For their part, the Ukrainians, in their overwhelming majority, are not ready to accept capitulation. We can talk as much as we want about an immediate ceasefire as the alternative to military support, but we must be aware that these are only empty words intended for the French public in the context of the electoral campaign. Certainly, the fighting will have to stop one day, and there will be a ceasefire in one form or another. The question is under what conditions for Ukraine this will happen: will it be on the offensive? Will it be sufficiently armed and supported to be in the most advantageous situation? What security guarantees are we prepared to grant in the highly probable event of a new invasion? We are in a moment of great uncertainty as to the evolution of the situation, which will depend on many factors. And in the face of uncertainty, the most reasonable and fair thing is to continue to support military aid to Ukraine.

I am aware that it is difficult as a feminist to assume such a position. This touches on the question of the identity of

War or peace? A false dilemma in the controversy

the movement, its antimilitarism and opposition to the state. The Ukrainian resistance has become the thorn in the side of all anti-capitalist, feminist and anti-imperialist organizations. Some have preferred to preserve the purity of their principles to the detriment of an analysis of the situation and concrete solidarity. However, I think, and this is what the [Ukrainian feminist manifesto](#) already affirmed in 2022, that feminist thought and practice are best able to place themselves systematically on the side of experience, according to the immediate interests of women victims of oppression, but also of women who resist, wherever they are. In Ukraine, tens of thousands of women resist the invasion with weapons; hundreds of thousands work in crucial public services, millions are involved in voluntary work. As feminists, we must be able to understand that our action is adjusted to the point of view from which we campaign.

Regarding support for Palestine, we are active within the camp that supports the aggressor. The most effective thing is therefore for us to fight against sending arms and for the unconditional cessation of fighting by Israel. This is the same type of action that Russian and Belarusian feminists are trying to take, to the best of their strength, towards their governments. But regarding Ukraine, we find ourselves in a country that is providing support to the country that is the victim of aggression. As long as there are no other realistic options, solidarity demands that we assume support for sending weapons to Ukraine. And that, against the campists of all sides, we proclaim: "[From Ukraine to Palestine, occupation is a crime!](#)".

This text was first published as a blog post in [Médiapart](#) on 15 March 2024

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[1] This text comes from an intervention during the [public meeting of the Paris region feminist assembly](#) on 12 March 2024.