

At Paris conference of support for Ukraine, Macron says West might at some point need to send troops to Ukraine



French President Emmanuel Macron at yesterday's conference of support for Ukraine.

Yesterday, at the invitation of French President Emmanuel Macron, the leaders or representatives of 27 European and North American governments met at the Élysée Palace in Paris in a one-day conference of support for Ukraine. The meeting included German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, Italian Premier Georgia Meloni, Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez, Polish President Andrzej Duda, British Foreign Secretary David Cameron, Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte (who is expected to take over in the near future from Jens Stoltenberg as the Secretary General of NATO), the leaders of the Baltic states and other European states, and U.S. Assistant Secretary of State James O'Brien and Canadian Minister of Defense Bill Blair. Ukrainian President Zelenskyy addressed the leaders by video and asked them to increase their support for Ukraine.

After the conference, Macron said the participants reaffirmed their unity and determination to stop Russia's war in Ukraine. The participants, he said, discussed the profound destabilization caused by Russia and its renewed aggression against Ukraine and against Europe. He said the conference gave the leaders the opportunity to discuss how they might respond more quickly and more effectively to the needs of Ukraine and its people. They agreed on five categories of actions on which there was a consensus for taking new initiatives: cyber-defense; co-production of military equipment in Ukraine; strengthening the defense of other countries threatened by the Russian offensive, most notably Moldova; support for Ukraine on its frontier with Belarus with non-military forces; and the demining of Ukrainian territory. Macron in particular insisted on the need to move more

quickly in producing ammunition and weapons, air defense, and medium and long-range missiles.

In the final line of the summary of the conference issued by his office, Macron insisted that “nothing should be excluded in order to stop the war of aggression being conducted by Russia in Ukraine. We should not exclude that there might be a need for security that then justifies some elements of deployment.” Needless to say, that last line attracted considerable attention in his press conference after the meeting. He said there was no consensus at the meeting on sending troops to Ukraine, but the subject could not be ruled out: “There is no consensus at this state...to send troops on the ground.” But, he added, “nothing should be excluded. We will do everything that we must so that Russia does not win.” He said, “In recent months particularly, we have seen Russia getting tougher. We also know that Russia is preparing new attacks, in particular to shock Ukrainian public opinion.” He reiterated what he had said at the meeting – that “Russia cannot and must not win the war.” And he added that the leaders agreed that they should be prepared for a possible attack by Russia in the coming years and that more efforts were needed to help Ukraine financially and militarily: “We all agree we don’t want to go to war with the Russian people, but we’re determined to keep escalation under control.” The purpose of the meeting, he said, was to see how those present could “do more in terms of military support and budget support.”

Not surprisingly, Stoltenberg, the Secretary General of NATO, said, “NATO allies are providing unprecedented support to Ukraine. We have done that since 2014 and stepped up after the full-scale invasion. But there are no plans for NATO combat troops on the ground in Ukraine.” He did add, however, that “this is a war of aggression by Russia against Ukraine, blatantly violating international law. According to international law, Ukraine of course has the right to self-defense, and we have the right to support them in upholding that right.” One immediate result of the meeting was that several leaders endorsed the proposal of Czech Prime Minister Petr Fiala to buy ammunition for Ukraine from countries around the world. After the meeting, Rutte announced that the Netherlands will contribute €100 million for that purpose.

In the meantime, as the leaders were meeting and talking about what more they might do, the Russian forces continued their offensive operations in eastern Ukraine. Yesterday, they conducted 25 attacks against the Ukrainian forces in and around the small city of Marinka a few miles west of Donetsk city, 19 attacks in the area around Avdiivka, which they had taken 10 days ago, and more than 50 attacks at other points along the contact line between the forces in eastern and southeastern Ukraine. And the war goes on.

David R. Cameron
February 27, 2024