

Gaullism or strategic commentary? France's complicated ambitions unfolding.

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French President Emmanuel Macron and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy meeting in France in April 2021

Jacob Sagers – French President Emmanuel Macron's comments two weeks ago in Paris rattled NATO and shellshocked European Union members. Macron emphasized that "nothing should be ruled out" about Russia's invasion of Ukraine – even potential deployment of Western soldiers in Ukraine. Military intervention would be a major rework in current Western policy focusing on Russian economic sanctions and Ukrainian financial support. Despite sharp rebukes from German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, Macron's words have shifted the dialogue about potential Western intervention in Ukraine. The remarks are not arbitrary, but signal towards French ambitions and a changing geopolitical code.

French **geopolitical codes**, or the way France positions itself through actions and justifications within the global community, stem from its desire to lead Europe. Many factors influence the situation, but one of Macron's highest priorities has been seeking closer relations with Germany.

The hope is they work together to be Europe's dominant power. Circumstances become more complex when Russia, and even the U.S., are in the picture. France has emboldened its efforts at countering Russia's influence, by increasing support to Ukraine, as an action to secure Europe and heighten France's standing. Hence, Macron's comments are not ludicrous but serve to benefit France's

geopolitical code. Countering influence does not stop with Russia but also the United States. Macron stated: "Should we delegate our future to the American voter? The answer is no, whatever their vote." Uncertainty in NATO and Europe surrounding upcoming American elections, and a potential second Trump administration, has revamped discourse about interdependence with the United States. While Russia is an immediate threat, American inconsistency, and a French historical goal to counter American power in Europe, leave one of Ukraine's most powerful allies in jeopardy.

France's complex geopolitical code, with an overarching desire for a united Europe behind the French state, ties into whether the country becomes a leading power by projecting and altering other European state and organization actions without force: **orideological power**. Discourse and its effects are one medium to measure a state's power. Macron's comments have shifted the conversation and temporarily renewed focus on further support for Ukraine, showcasing French influence. The extent to which Macron can expand France's power without military intervention is unpredictable. Yet, France's ambitions have changed the conversation, and potential policy, surrounding Western actions in Ukraine.

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