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Insights from the
17th Kyiv Security Forum

Kyiv Hosts Global Support

Putin Hosts a Parade of Tyrants

3 Main Points

1. Ukraine has become a fast, self-reliant defense innovator, urging frozen Russian assets to fund its tech sector. 2. With U.S. security guarantees less certain, Europe must back Ukraine directly—not just in solidarity, but because it now serves as the continent’s key bulwark against aggression. 3. A



“Reverse Kissinger” approach to Russia won’t work; lasting security depends on strong democratic alliances, not deals with autocrats.

About the Author

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17th Kyiv Security Forum

Kyiv Hosts Global Support. Putin Hosts a Parade of Tyrants.

On May 8–9, as Europe marked the 80th anniversary of Victory in Europe Day with solemn remembrance, Vladimir Putin staged a glittering military parade alongside some of today’s most notorious strongmen. While tanks rolled through Moscow’s Red Square, Kyiv’s Premier Palace convened diplomats, defence innovators, and civil society under the banner “UA: Unite Again to Defeat the Global Aggressor.” While placing memorial flowers before photographs of recently fallen soldiers, everyone was in anticipation of new air attacks, just as seen multiple times the days prior. In the end, despite continuous fighting along the front line, Kyiv kept being spared from new attacks and though the war’s toll weighs heavily, a quiet optimism pulsed through the conference halls.

Here are the key takeaways:

1. Ukraine’s Home-Grown Defence Powerhouse

The centerpiece of that optimism was Ukraine’s astonishing emergence as a self-reliant defence innovator. Over 1 500 startups and medium firms now design and produce modular drones, loitering munitions, electronic-warfare kits, and reconnaissance vehicles—frequently assembled from off-the-shelf parts ordered online and delivered to the front in days. Experts described a



newly forged 30 km-wide “death zone,” where Russian formations suffer catastrophic losses. What once took Western suppliers months to field now deploys within weeks at a fraction of the cost. Many voices urged that a significant slice of the \$350 billion in frozen Russian assets be channelled directly into Ukraine’s defence-tech ecosystem, arguing that every dollar invested here buys exponentially more “boots-on-wings” than through legacy European or U.S. arms contracts.

2. Europe’s Self-defence Through Solidarity

“By defending Ukraine, Europe defends itself,” became the Forum’s rallying cry. Yet the gathering revealed a geopolitical imbalance: U.S. officials outnumbered their European counterparts, and senior figures from Germany, France, and the U.K. were surprisingly scarce. However, this was compensated the following day, as Germany’s Chancellor Merz joined Presidents Macron, Tusk and U.K. leader Starmer in Kyiv to meet President Zelenskiy. Their joint communiqué reaffirmed political and military support and called for a 30-day ceasefire, underscoring that solidarity must translate into sustained, high-level engagement by Europe's coalition of the willing.

Notably, Ukraine’s parliament ratified the landmark minerals agreement mid-conference—an initiative poised to fund reconstruction without new debt—yet it went almost unnoticed in panel discussions.

3. “Reverse Kissinger” Is a Mirage

A few attendees mused about a “Reverse Kissinger” strategy—seeking a U.S.–Russia détente to isolate China, the mirror image of Henry Kissinger’s 1970s U.S. opening to Beijing to counter Soviet influence. Some speculated that President Trump, given his repeated expressions of sympathy for Putin, might try to follow such a strategy. But the forums’ consensus was unambiguous: It won’t work. China–Russia ties today are far deeper than any transactional U.S. offering could outbid. Rather, the U.S. should focus on cementing alliances rooted in shared democratic values, not brittle power-plays or mercenary troop swaps.



4. A New Dawn of Hope

By the Forum's close, Kyiv's spring light had inspired what one delegate called a felt new dawn of hope. Ukraine's home-grown defence ingenuity now forms Europe's bulwark. Directing frozen Russian assets into Kyiv's startups would turbocharge battlefield innovation at unmatched speed and value. Additionally, fresh Western assistance—from advanced weapon deliveries to senior political pledges, have reignited momentum on the front. At the same time, Putin's erratic gambits are better understood, and America's occasional unpredictability has driven home a vital lesson: Europe can no longer outsource its security. Over recent months, Brussels and its capitals have come to see that standing shoulder-to-shoulder with Kyiv is not mere solidarity but essential self-preservation—and this hard-won clarity now fuels the political will to safeguard the continent's future. True strength lies in deepening partnerships built on shared democratic values, not transactional overtures to autocrats. As Putin paraded with autocrats, Kyiv stood as Europe's true bastion of freedom and innovation—our collective shield against the forces of chaos.