Russia and the West: Yesterday's Enemies

Tehmina Mahmood

Abstract

The bipolar world ended with the end of the Cold War which paved the way for a period of détente and relaxation of tension between Russia and the West, especially the United States (US). In that changed international environment both Russia and the US made efforts to redefine their relationship based on mutual respect which resulted in a friendly relationship. A major outcome of this understanding was the reunification of Germany, building of the Nord Stream gas pipeline and an understanding about arms control and disarmament. However this cooperation began to erode as the Western countries made their moves eastwards through inviting Eastern European countries to join the European Union (EU) Many of them became its members and also of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (Nato).

These moves came under criticism from Russia but Russia could not take a strong action, at that time, because of its weak economic position and as it was faced with post-Soviet problems. However, after President Vladimir Putin assumed power in Russia, his economic policies boomed and he emerged as a strong leader and began to play an active and assertive role at the international level. He was seen as a threat in the West and this threat perception of the West led to the Ukraine war, conflict over the Nord Stream gas pipeline and failure of the arms control and disarmament agreements. This situation is reflected in President Putin's statement in which he called the West 'enemies of yesterday'.[1]*This paper attempts to analyze the circumstances and causes, of the mistrust and lack of understanding, that obstructs the relationship to develop between Russia and the West.*

Keywords: Nord Stream, gas pipeline, enemies, Russia, West, Ukraine, arms control.

Introduction

The confrontation between Russia and the West began to develop after European attempts to move Ukraine into the EU against Russia's warning. For Russia, it was a direct threat to its security. However, the

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[1] *Dawn* (Karachi), 5 December 2014.

West remained defiant and continued its policy of eastward expansion. The US and its Western allies see Russia as an expansionist power and they think Russia will continue with its efforts to regain its lost status after the fall of the Soviet Union (SU).

From the Russian perspective, the Ukraine crisis was not caused by Russia, but emerged in response to the attempts of the US and its Western allies who consider themselves as the winners' of the Cold War and wish to impose their will everywhere.'[2] Putin blamed Nato for launching a proxy war in eastern Ukraine to destabilize Russia.

In the wake of Russian and American threat perceptions, the issue of arms control and disarmament has been another irritant on which both sides have failed to make a compromise, putting the security of the whole world at stake.

The Nord Stream gas pipeline project was purely an economic project, where Germany acquired Russian gas at a cheaper price, fell prey to regional politics and became controversial after the US, European and Baltic countries strongly opposed it, saying that it would make Europe dependent on Russia and would provide Russia with political leverage over Europe.

However, the US and the West failed to get consensus for their narrative from many countries of the world, particularly after middle powers such as Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS) refused to associate themselves with one bloc or the other and that left the West high and dry. Therefore, the rift between the US and the rest of the world has been a big hurdle in moving towards a peaceful resolution of conflicts, especially with Russia.

Russia and the West: struggle for domination

The growing differences between Russia and the West not only affected regional politics, but also disturbed the world order. During the Cold War, the US declared the SU and communism as great threats to the whole world and all its political and military strategy evolved around the sole issue of containing communism. After the collapse of the SU, the West saw an opportunity to move the eastern European countries into its sphere of influence. Obviously, this posed a challenge for Russia and its counter strategy renewed the race between Russia and the West for domination that ended with the end of the Cold War.

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[2] *The Guardian* (London), 13 November 2015

Russia believes that Western countries do not want to see a strong Russia. They want to weaken it through destroying its economy, through regime change and through economic sanctions. Russians believe that US intervention in many countries of the world resulted in regime change, since the end of the Cold War, as in Kosovo, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya, posing a threat to world peace and security. Russia, therefore, is convinced that the US and the West are determined to pave the way for a regime change in Russia one way or the other. They set certain standards for others but do not follow these standards themselves. So far, Russia seems to be determined to resist pressure from the US and Europe. This war of perception by the two sides culminated into an armed conflict over Ukraine.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov called for an end to the outdated world order dominated by the West; he favoured a democratic order in which each country is defined by its sovereignty**.** He added that the time when the West called the shots was over and that the Americans think 'we are number one and everyone else has to recognize that.' It shows that the US wants to dominate the world and to be the first among equals.[3] Under Russia's new national security strategy, Nato and the US pose fundamental threats to Russia's future. Eastern Europeans countries, however, have been trying to play a balancing act. They want to have good relations with Russia and simultaneously want to become members of the EU. Ideologically these countries are closer to Russia and have pro-Russian sentiments; they are against sanctions imposed by Western countries on Russia. Western countries are obsessed with the Russian threat and they believe that Russia intends to attack various European countries to make Russia great again like Trump's making America great again.

To counter Russia's growing influence, the West decided to deploy its troops in Poland and in some of the Baltic states and also planned to place their anti-ballistic missile system in central Europe. In response, Russia threatened to deploy its new weapons in Europe to counter the US moves to protect its allies.[4]

These moves by both sides pose a big challenge by way of arms control and disarmament which perpetuates Putin's perception of the West as yesterday's enemies. Various efforts were made to make reductions in arms control and armament as in the 1991 Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START), in the 1993 START II and in the 2010 New START Treaty which were signed by Russia and the US. Under START I both

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[3] *The Nation* (Lahore), 19 February 2017.
[4] *The News* (Karachi), 4 May 2012.

countries agreed to make reductions in their total number of nuclear warheads and bombs by one-third.

The collapse of the SU led to the problem of the implementation of START I as SU's nuclear weapons and delivery systems were spread out between three republics and Russia, each of which was now independent of Soviet control: Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine. All these republics ratified the START I treaty and agreed either to destroy their weapons or turn them over to Russia.[5] The START II treaty made 50 per cent reduction in their nuclear stockpiles, reducing them 3,500 to 3,000 by each country. In response to Nato's expanding moves towards Russian borders, former Russian president Dmitry Medvedev indicated, in March 2009, that Russia would begin large-scale rearmament to enhance its military, naval, and nuclear power that it deemed necessary for its security.

After the START I treaty expired in December 2009, the US and Russia reached an agreement under the New START treaty that was supposed to limit their nuclear warheads, missiles, bombers and launchers.[6]

After US allegations that Russia was violating arms control agreements, Russia suspended its participation in New START talks in 2023, but it did not withdraw from the treaty and clarified that it would continue to abide by the numerical limits in the treaty.[7]

Professor of political science and international affairs at Northeastern University, Denise Garcia, blamed the two most armed nuclear powers for the expiration of the START treaties and it was a great concern for international efforts to limit nuclear weapons, particularly in the wake of President Trump's statement with regard to resuming nuclear testing.[8]

According to Stephen Flynn, an expert at Northeastern University, the START I treaty was agreed upon in the aftermath of the Cold War to control the development of nuclear weapons after years of expansion. The START treaties played an important role in putting a cap on nuclear advancement and they significantly reduced Russian and US nuclear stockpiles. He said that the end of the treaties brings us back to those scary times and risks of an arms race that started in a bipolar world. Now

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5 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/START_I
6 Ibid.
7 Ibid.
8 https://news.northeastern.edu/2026/02/11/start-treaty-us-russia-nuclear-war/

we are faced with the massive nuclear force of China, and other countries that are looking to join the nuclear club.[9]

President Trump refused to extend the New START treaty, calling it a 'badly negotiated deal' and suggested that nuclear experts should work on a new, improved, and modernized treaty that can last long into the future.

The Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) was signed between the US and Russia in 1987, which banned nuclear, conventional, ground-launched ballistic missiles, cruise missiles and missile launchers that the two countries had in their possession. Both eliminated 2,692 missiles, followed by ten years of on-site verification inspections by 1991. In 2018, President Trump announced the US withdrawal from the INF treaty accusing Russia of violating it by developing and deploying an intermediate-range cruise missile known as the SSC-8 (Novator 9M729). Another reason cited by the US behind the withdrawal from the treaty was to counter a Chinese arms buildup in the Pacific and in the South China Sea as China was not a signatory to the treaty. Then Russia abandoned the treaty.[10]

Russia denied that it had violated the INF treaty and urged the US to fulfill its responsibility with regard to the implementation of the INF and made a commitment to act responsibly following the termination of the treaty, but would closely monitor the actions of the US.

Ukraine war: Russia and Western confrontation

The negotiations amongst the SU, the US and West Germany, following the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989, led to an agreement on the Soviet military withdrawal from East Germany and German reunification.

After Russia and the US agreed upon the reunification of Germany, the US assured Russia that there would be no further eastward expansion from European countries. The problem over Ukraine started when Western countries began to develop relations with Eastern European countries and some of them became members of the EU and Nato. Under President George Bush, seven more countries were included – Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Bulgaria, and Romania in 2004. Addressing the Munich Security Summit in 2007, President Putin stated that Western countries assured the SU that there would be no eastward expansion, even by an inch, and now ten countries have

[9] Ibid.
[10] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Intermediate-Range_Nuclear_Forces_Treaty

become members of the EU. Putin said they must stop it now as this was a complete violation of their commitment following German reunification.

The problem further aggravated when Western countries at their summit in April 2008 announced that Georgia and Ukraine would become members of the EU and Nato. As both these countries share borders with Russia, it obviously alarmed Russia. These commitments made by the two sides have been mentioned by international experts, including American political analyst, Jeffrey Sachs. Talking to the European Parliament on the 'Geopolitics of Peace' in February 2025, he said that an agreement was made between the US and Russia that Nato would not move one inch eastwards. He referred to various documents including the National Security Archive of George Washington University and a website called 'What Gorbachev Heard About NATO' that provide all information about this issue. He added that a change took place when US president Bill Clinton signed off on Nato enlargement to the east in 1994 as they thought that after the fall of the SU, Russia would not be in a position to resist such moves, and this was the time to take this step. Since then, Ukraine became the deep state project for US governments. It did not really matter who the president was, each president would pursue this project. So, it was actually Clinton who signed on to this project.[11]

In 2014, the US overthrew the elected pro-Russian government through a coup and a pro-Western government was established in Ukraine. This time, Russia reacted by taking over Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula and the newly set up government alleged that Russia was backing pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine. Clashes took place between Ukrainian government forces and separatists in eastern Ukraine and many people were killed on both sides.

Having seen the strong Russian reaction, Germany and France tried to mediate between Russia and Ukraine as French President Macron and former German chancellor Merkel went to Russia to sort out matters with President Putin. Chancellor Merkel said that despite serious differences with Russia, talks must continue with it to have an idea about what is happening on the other side.

As a result of German and French mediation, talks were held between the eastern provinces of Ukraine and the government of Ukraine in Minsk, and two Minsk agreements were signed in 2014 and 2015. In the first agreement, they agreed to an immediate ceasefire, weapons withdrawal from the combat zone, international observation and verification of the ceasefire, prisoners exchange and humanitarian aid to

[11] https://singjupost.com/full-transcript-jeffrey-sachs-on-the-tucker-carlson-sho

the conflict-affected areas.[12] The second Minsk agreement included a ceasefire, withdrawal of heavy weapons from the front line, release of prisoners of war, constitutional reforms in Ukraine granting self-government to certain areas of Donbas and restoring control of the state border to the Ukrainian government.[13]

Germany and France played an important role in finalizing the Minsk agreements. Germany was actually concerned that if war happened, it would damage the German economy as it was dependent on Ukraine and Russia for the supply of gas.

The Minsk agreements failed to stop the war as both sides, accused each other for not implementing the agreement in its true sense and blamed each other for violating the ceasefire. Ukraine continued to blame Russia for arming the separatist groups, claiming that Russian regular forces were involved in the conflict.

The US was not happy with the Minsk agreements as it was not included in the talks. When chancellor Merkel asked the Biden administration to waive sanctions against the Nord Stream pipeline, Biden asked Germany to drop the Minsk agreements and asked Russia to hold direct talks with Ukraine. In response to Merkel, Putin said Russia was not a party to the Minsk agreements so it had nothing to do with this problem.

Russia started military exercises along the Ukraine border and said that if the Minsk agreements were implemented, there would be no war. The United Nation Security Council (UNSC) also passed a resolution stating that the Minsk agreements should be implemented by both sides.[14] However, the situation further deteriorated after Ukraine killed many important leaders of eastern Ukraine, then Russia declared war in February 2022 against Ukraine. The West imposed sanctions against Russia and began to provide military aid to Ukraine. Nato Secretary General Mark Rutte warned that a Russian victory over Ukraine would directly threaten Western security and it would strengthen Russia, China, North Korea and Iran. So, we are going to fully support Ukraine.[15]

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[12] https://www.google.com/search?sca_esv=916ec883b16d68de&q=Minsk+agreement+2014&sa=X&ve

[13] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Minsk_agreements

[14] https://www.google.com/search?q=when+United+Nation+Security+Council+(UNSC)+also+passed+a+resolution+which+said+that+Mins

[15] https://www.google.com/search?q=when+Nato+chief+said+that+if+Russia+wins+war+in+ Ukraine%2C+it+

The West was quite confident that they would drag Russia into a long proxy war. They would impose sanctions that would destroy the Russian economy, weaken Putin's power and be able to topple his government. However, all these efforts failed to bring Putin down. On the contrary, Russia caused huge damage to Ukraine's military and infrastructure and continued to capture Ukrainian territory. The Russian economy continued to grow, and even the IMF said that the Russian economy was quite stable. Given this situation, Russia was not inclined to end the war because, for Russians, Ukraine is an existential threat and their survival is at stake. Lack of trust exists between the two sides on many issues, and the threat perception on both sides is so strong that peacemaking efforts always end in failure.

The Biden administration was providing all military and financial support to Ukraine; however, despite that support Ukraine was on the losing end and Russia continued making advances into Ukrainian territory. The US Congress refused to further provide financial aid to Ukraine because it was losing its territory. President Biden then bypassed the Congress and continued US supplies to Ukraine through different ways.[16]

The US position changed after Donald Trump assumed power and maintained that he would no longer provide aid to Ukraine, showing his determination to end the war. Several times he entered into negotiations with Russia and Ukraine, but Western countries refused to make a peace deal to end the war until Russia accepted their terms and conditions. Western countries were well aware of the reality that Ukraine was losing in the battlefield, but they still wanted to impose their terms on Russia.

The West had to struggle to convince the rest of the world that the Russian invasion of Ukraine was a threat to world peace. Many countries preferred to stay away from the confrontation between the West and Russia over Ukraine. The BRICS countries refused to get involved in the conflict and insisted on a peaceful resolution of the dispute. African leaders followed the same policy of being neutral. They refused to take sides with the West over Ukraine and that is the big transformation from a bipolar world to a multipolar world order after the end of the Cold War.

After facing huge military and territorial losses, Ukraine and Western countries began to talk about peace. At Kyiv's request, Switzerland offered to help and hosted a peace conference to build support for Ukraine's peace proposals. Saudi Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhan said

[16] https://www.google.com/search?q=About+Russia+made+it+clear+that+it+could+only+end+ the+war%3A+If+Ukraine+a

that Russia must be part of any peace deal to achieve a credible and permanent peace in the region. The Swiss government maintained that after they get an international consensus for a peace proposal, they would invite Russia to the next meeting. Only 90 countries went to attend the meeting, other countries preferred to stay neutral. However, the talks did not go well; many important countries refused to sign the final communiqué, indicating that they did not want to go against Russia.

Seeing the outcome of the meeting where the West could not build a consensus, Russia made it clear that it could only end the war:

- If Ukraine agreed to drop its demand for Nato membership.
- Ukraine would hand over all the territories that Russia had captured during the war.
- There would be an end to sanctions against Russia.[17]

Ukraine and the West refused to accept these Russian demands. Putin said that the US wanted to continue the Ukraine war to the end. He said Ukrainians are not fighting for themselves; they are fighting for the US, because it was the US that was running the whole show in Ukraine.

Western governments were pushing Ukraine to achieve some military success before starting negotiations with Russia. To counter Western pressure, Russia took a number of steps to show its strength at the international level. A Russian nuclear-powered submarine reached Cuba in June 2024. The US and Cuba said it posed no threat, but it was widely seen as a Russian power show as tension was rising over Ukraine. It was certainly a message to the US that Moscow could challenge it in its own sphere of influence. It just happened after the US gave a green light to Ukraine to use American weapons to strike inside Russia. Then Putin responded by sending war ships to Cuba.[18]

President Putin made a two-nation trip to North Korea and Vietnam in June 2024 to build a trustworthy partnership in the Asia-Pacific region. These visits were viewed by many as a show of defiance against the West. During his visit to North Korea, Putin commended it for its support for Russia's military action in Ukraine. Both sides agreed that only a multipolar world order based on justice and mutual respect for sovereignty would move the world towards stability and security. They accused the US of trying to impose a global neocolonial dictatorship based

[17] *Dawn*, 16 June 2024.
[18] *Dawn*, 13 June 2024.

on double standards. Both countries signed the Treaty on Comprehensive Strategic Partnership which included:

- Mutual Defense Pact: under the agreement both countries agreed to provide immediate military and other assistance if either country is attacked.
- Economic and Tech Cooperation: they agreed to strengthen cooperation in trade, science, space technology, and biology, while both leaders pledged to jointly oppose international sanctions.

During his trip to Vietnam, Putin said that 'we are firmly committed to deepening the comprehensive strategic partnership with Vietnam, which remains among the priorities of Russia's foreign policy.'[19]

Another move was made by Russia and China by holding joint drills in the Sea of Japan as part of a major naval exercise which, according to Russia, was the largest of its kind for three decades. Putin has said 'under the pretext of countering the alleged Russian threat and containing China, the US and its satellites are increasing their military presence near Russia's western borders, in the Arctic and in the Asia-Pacific region.'[20]

Far-right parties in the West criticized their governments for supporting Ukraine which caused economic problems for the people in their own countries. German far-right parties boycotted Zelenskyy's address to their parliament saying they would support a peace president and not a war president.[21]

From Russia's point of view, its actions did not aggravate the escalation in Ukraine, it was the West and the US that had been trying to get the sympathies of the world through building their narrative over the Ukraine issue. Later on, several European leaders admitted that they had been deceiving Russia as they were using that time to arm the Ukrainian military.[22] Further, they deployed high-precision modern weapons such as Atacms, Storm Shadow and Russia believed that Ukrainian servicemen could not execute these operations without space

[19] *Dawn*, 19 June 2024.
[20] *The Nation*, 11 September 2024.
[21] http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/75385
[22] http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/75385

reconnaissance, target indication and Western software – requiring the direct involvement of officers from Nato countries.[23]

The US provided long-range missiles to Ukraine for its defence only, but later the Biden administration gave a signal to Ukraine to use its long-range missiles inside Russia. On 6 August 2024, Ukraine made a surprise attack on the Kursk region of Russia.[24] Ukrainian forces, crossed into Russia with armoured vehicles, quickly capturing over 28 settlements, including the town of Sudzha.[25] It was the first attack on Russian territory since the Second World War.

At first, the Ukrainian forces seemed to be successful, capturing large undefended territory in Kursk and they claimed it as their victory. The strategic objectives of the Ukraine attack included:

- Diverting Russian forces: Ukraine's aim was to force Russia to withdraw its troops from the critical eastern front (Donetsk region) to defend itself in the Kursk region.
- Creating a buffer zone: Ukraine wanted Russia to move its artillery further away from the Ukrainian border to defend the Sumy region.
- Bargaining chip: Ukraine believed that if they capture territory inside Russia, they would get an advantage over Russia and that would help them while negotiating for a future peace agreement.
- Boosting morale: another objective was to prove its military strength to show that Ukraine still had the power to defy Russia and it can cross Russia's 'red lines'.[26]

Moscow rapidly retaliated by targeting the Ukrainian troops who found themselves in an exposed position. The result was devastating for Kyiv as they suffered heavy causalities and the attack weakened Ukraine's own position. According to many analysts, the Kursk invasion caught Russians off guard but they quickly recovered. There was a general opinion that the Kursk attack did not prove be a game changer for Ukraine as Russia moved its aircraft beyond the range of US-supplied ATACM missiles.[27]

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[23] Ibid.
[24] *Dawn,* 12 August 2024.
[25] Ibid.
[26] *Dawn,* 12 August 2024.
[27] *Dawn*, 7 September 2024.

The Kursk invasion also exposed the Biden administration's strategy to avoid direct military conflict with Russia and to keep arming Ukraine to escalate the conflict. However, the combined efforts of the US and the West to bolster Ukraine's military failed to alter the balance of power in their favour. The Kursk attack, while initially seen as a bold move, exposed Ukraine's vulnerabilities and strengthened Russia's position.[28]

Subsequently, Ukraine focused on convincing President Trump to provide security guarantees against Russia before making a peace deal with it. He tried to persuade Trump that it was the lack of security guarantees for Ukraine 12 years ago that allowed Russia to start with the occupation of Crimea and the war in Donbas, then the lack of security guarantees allowed Russia to launch a full-scale invasion. Trump refused to provide any security guarantees to Ukraine and blamed Ukraine for Russia's 2022 invasion. He called Zelenskyy 'the greatest salesman of all time' after his country received billions of dollars in military aid from the West.[29] Their disagreement ultimately led to a public clash during a joint press conference at the White House, where Zelenskyy angered Trump about his soft approach towards Putin and called Putin a killer. Trump accused him of not being interested in a peace deal with Russia while his people were being killed and urged him to secure a peace deal or risk losing Ukraine altogether.[30] Trump suspended military aid to Ukraine, escalating pressure on Kyiv to agree to peace negotiations with Russia. Trump also warned he would not put up much longer with Zelensky's defiance.

The Russian position was that every time Ukraine came with any proposal for peace talks or a ceasefire, its intention was to gain more time to rearm itself and attack Russia again to change the course of the war in its favour. Ukraine lost its territory, manpower and military assets, but it refused to abandon its demand to join Nato or to surrender.

Conflict over Nord Stream gas pipeline

The Nord Stream gas pipeline project consists of two pipelines: Nord Stream 1 and Nord Stream 2; they go through Russia to Germany. Nord Stream 1 is the longest undersea pipeline in the world. The Nord Stream 2 pipeline, however, could not become operational because of the differences between the West and Russia over Ukraine. Nord Stream 1 was built by Russian company Gazprom which has 51 per cent control of the pipeline and total ownership of Nord Stream 2. German, French

[28] *The Nation*, 17 August 2024.
[29] *The News*, 20 Feb 2025.
[30] *The Nation* 28 February 2025.

and Dutch companies own much of the remaining 49 per cent of Nord Stream 1.[31]

Before the Ukraine war, more than half of Russian gas went to Europe through Ukraine. Nord Stream 1 benefits Germany more because it gets this gas without having to pay a fee to any other transit countries. For Russia, the gas goes through one route, making it easier to bypass transit networks.

It was German chancellor Merkel who came up with the idea of Nord Stream 2, while Putin was extremely reluctant about building further pipelines to Europe. Merkel and the German business community believed this pipeline would get Germany away from nuclear power and coal, moving towards a carbon-free future.[32] However, chancellor Merkel consistently supported the Nord Stream 2 pipeline, saying it was a purely commercial energy project rather than a geopolitical tool. She maintained that securing cheap Russian natural gas was vital for Germany's energy transition as it phased out nuclear power and coal. She stated that 'Ukraine is and will remain a transit country even when Nord Stream 2 is completed.'[33] Putin also said that this project was free from politics and was a purely economic and commercial project.

Poland, Ukraine and the Baltic states, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, opposed Nord Stream 2 as they feared that it would replace the Ukraine pipeline and the loss of billions of dollars in transit fees would hit Ukraine's economy hard. Ukraine was also concerned that the pipeline will tighten Moscow's grip over the region's energy supply and strengthen its influence in the region. Zelenskyy said that Ukraine could not trust Russia, pointing out Russia's 2014 annexation of the Ukrainian region of Crimea and its backing for pro-Russian separatists in a conflict in eastern Ukraine as grounds for the mistrust. Several German politicians also opposed it, because it could give Moscow greater political leverage over Berlin. Poland called on the US to impose sanctions against this pipeline. The US House of Representatives passed a bill which said that Russia was using energy exports to coerce its neighbours.[34]

The US also was critical of this project as it would make Germany too dependent on Russia. Western countries see Nord Stream 2 as a threat to US and EU security. Americans took drastic measures against the

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[31] https://lieber.westpoint.edu/attacking-pipeline-legal-issues-consideration/

[32] https://www.google.com/search?q=Former+German+chancellor+Angla+Merkle+statem

[33] Ibid.

[34] https://www.google.com/search?q=Former+German+chancellor+Angla+Merkle+statem

project, imposing sanctions on it. President Trump first imposed sanctions on the Nord Stream 2 pipeline in December 2019, targeting companies involved in laying pipes. Further sanctions were approved in 2020 and 2021 in response to Russia's escalation in Ukraine.

However, during her visit to the US in July 2021, chancellor Merkel convinced president Biden to waive sanctions against the pipeline. Ultimately, Biden and Merkel reached a deal to waive sanctions against Nord Stream 2, with an assurance from Germany that Russia would not use Nord Stream as a 'political weapon' and if that happened the US would impose sanctions upon it. Both sides also assured Poland and Ukraine that they would continue to get Russian gas supplies. Ukraine was to receive a 50 million-dollar loan for green technology until 2024 and Germany will provide a billion-dollar fund to promote Ukraine's transition to green energy to compensate for the loss of the gas transit fees.[35]

In August 2021, Secretary of State Anthony Blinken announced that the US was waiving sanctions on the Nord Stream 2 pipeline. However, this pipeline was damaged by underwater explosions in September 2022 when Swedish seismologists detected explosions off the coast of the Danish island of Bornholm. Some media reports held Russia responsible for the explosions, others pointed to a small group of Ukrainian military personnel who were behind the blasts and some reports were of the view that the explosions were directed by the Americans.[36]

However, the *Washington Post, New York Times* and other American newspapers reported that the explosions were planned and carried out by a senior Ukrainian military officer led six-person team that also included civilian divers. They rented a sailing vessel using false identities and were able to place explosives on the pipelines.[37] Many international experts believed that Ukraine made these explosions with the backing of the US. Denmark and Sweden concluded it was an act of sabotage, but closed their investigations in February 2024 without identifying any suspects.[38]

In January 2025, the Ukraine gas transit agreement with Russia expired and Ukraine refused to renew the agreement, saying it was important for its national security to end economic dependence on Russia,

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[35] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nord_Stream_2
[36] https://lieber.westpoint.edu/attacking-pipeline-legal-issues-consideration/
[37] Ibid.
[38] https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/what-is-known-about-nord-stream-gas-pipeline-

and it is to prevent Russia from using the money for war through energy sales. 'We stopped the transit of Russian gas, this is a historic event, Russia is losing its markets, it will suffer financial losses, Europe has already made the decision to abandon Russian gas,'[39] the Ukrainian president maintained.

Ukraine supplied Russian natural gas through its territory to other European countries, including Slovakia, Moldova and Hungary, and it obviously was a big blow to these countries. Slovakian Prime Minister Robert Fico strongly criticized Ukraine's decision for stopping the transport of gas through its territory. He warned that Europe would be badly affected by this move, not Russia.[40]

On the one hand, the EU is determined to defeat Russia in the Ukraine war, providing non-stop military aid to Ukraine; on the other hand, they are still getting gas supplies from Russia through Nord Stream 1. This is an irony that has no logic, but is the cruel reality of world politics.

Conclusion

The reunification of Germany, building of Nord Stream gas pipelines and arms control agreements provided both Russia and the West with space to reshape their relationship to achieve a secure and stable world order. However, both sides are still struggling to find practical solutions for moving towards a peaceful coexistence, as in the Western world an assertive Russia is seen a severe threat to its security. On the Russian side, they have always been skeptical about Western motives which they think are to weaken Russia. So, after Western attempts to incorporate Eastern European countries, and especially Ukraine which shares a border with Russia, into the EU and Nato, Russia felt compelled to strike back.

Russia believes that its true enemy is the West rather than Ukraine itself. Russia insists that it would accept the peace deal if it leads to long-term peace and eliminates the root causes of this crisis. Western countries thought they could paint Russia as the aggressor in the Ukraine war that violated international law and the world would buy their narrative, but that did not happen. Many critics of the Ukraine war in the West said that, instead of isolating Russia, they have become isolated. Even the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline that was supposed to

[39] https://www.google.com/search?q=When+Ukraine+refused+to+renew+
[40] Ibid.

benefit both sides went down the hill because of mistrust, again a manifestation of the cruel reality of world politics.

As a great power, Russia has always been a dominant factor in shaping regional and global politics. Russia is a huge country in terms of territory, military potential, vast natural resources and being a permanent member of the UN Security Council provides it with great political and economic leverage in Europe.[41] For this reason, all European and US attempts to undermine Russian power through economic sanctions have failed to make an impact. Russia succeeded in gaining control of the Donbas region of Ukraine and caused a huge destruction in Ukraine.

President Trump's efforts to end the war between Russia and Ukraine failed to yield results because of the continuing Western military support to Ukraine and their desire to keep an upper hand in making a final peace with Russia. The same US policy also obstructed the arms control and disarmament agreements. According to Putin, you cannot just impose your version of democracy, of good or evil, on people of other cultures and other religions and traditions in this mechanical, automatic way.[42] Therefore, it is doubtful that Russia and the West will ever be able to come out of the quagmire of being 'enemies of yesterday.'

[41] *The Nation*, February 2015.
[42] *The Nation*, 22 December 2015.