

# Tragedy of the West: Sacrificing Ukraine and the Rules-Based Order

Why Ukraine Is Essential to Preserving Global Democracy and Security



CEED

JUN 15, 2026



Ukraine stands as a battered but resilient shield, while the broken scales of justice symbolize the weakening of the rules-based international order.

**The result of Russia's war of aggression is a product of the ambivalence of the West, which by turns supported Ukraine's defence in the conflict and refused to escalate its response to a level consistent with the threat Russia poses. The rules-based order is at stake, and Ukraine stands alone in its defence.**

In the autumn of 2024, in the run-up to the US presidential elections, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky presented then presidential candidate Donald Trump with his Victory Plan for Ukraine. Now, just a year later, President Trump has issued an ultimatum to Zelensky, demanding Kyiv accept a 28-point framework for Ukraine's surrender to Russia.

Russia has been unable to force Ukraine to surrender after nearly twelve years of brutal war and genocide, but in less than a year in office, Trump is close to coercing Ukraine into accepting defeat through a pseudo 'peace' deal. This dramatic turn of events illustrates the radical transformation of the global security order since Trump's return to power.

By backing the Kremlin's demands to Ukraine – and Europe – with American pressure, the US administration is enabling Moscow to weaponise 'peace' against Ukraine. At its core, Trump's proposal legitimises Russia's unprovoked, illegal aggression. By rewarding the aggressor and punishing the victim – limiting its sovereignty, sacrificing its people to occupation and denying true security, justice and compensation – the US administration is pushing the world to the brink of collapse of the liberal, rules-based order.

Today, the fate of the liberal, rules-based order is forged on the battlefields in Ukraine as much as it is determined by the stance of Western nations. While Ukrainians have held the front line of the rules-based order through tenacious fighting and immense suffering, Western nations may abandon it without a fight. Any settlement to Russia's war premised on a blatant disregard for international law will become a wrecking ball, destroying the remaining façade of the post-Second World War system.

**Western Failure to Stop Russia has been Paving the Way for the 'New Order' of**

# Unfreedom for Years

Trump's 28-point list is emblematic of the West rapidly losing its leadership in world affairs to the ascendant authoritarian powers.

For the last eight decades, the West's global influence has been premised on the strength and appeal of the liberal rules-based international order which allowed humankind to enjoy decades of unprecedented security, the universal spread of freedom and protection of human dignity and growing worldwide prosperity. It is now being dismantled before our eyes.

The tragedy of the West is not the result of military defeat but the inherent outcome of a long string of compromised policies which have emboldened authoritarian regimes. Rogue actors such as Russia, China and North Korea have capitalised on the lack of political will in Western nations to do what it takes to uphold the rules-based order.

Western policy towards Russia has suffered on all accounts. Western governments have generously financed the rise of Putin's revanchist regime, even as they witnessed growing authoritarianism, militarisation and the explicit threat of Russia's aggressive foreign policy.

While pursuing closer ties with Russia, the West has displayed unwise disregard for its own security interests. Russia's violations of international law have been rewarded with 'resets' and greater integration into the global economy. In essence, the West has been recalibrating its declared principles to accommodate the Russian revanchist agenda. Russia has been exporting not only gas and oil to the West, but also corruption of high-level political and business establishments, subversion of democratic processes, propaganda, its network of influence, organised crime and intelligence agents.

After Russia launched its war of aggression on Ukraine in 2014, Western rhetoric shifted, but the substance of its policies – the appeasement of

Moscow, which rested on three elements: refraining from upholding international law, sacrificing Ukraine's interests and continuing business as usual – did not.

Russia's illegal war of aggression went unrecognised until 2022. The purely symbolic slap of sanctions on Moscow's wrists in 2014 did not reflect the gravity of Russia's blatant attack on international law and Europe's security order. A de facto military embargo was imposed on Ukraine 'not to provoke Russia'; in reality, it was to keep Ukraine vulnerable and submissive. No Russian has ever been brought to international justice for killing any Ukrainian. No compensation for destroyed lives or property has been awarded. Massive investments into the Russian economy have continued. European security interests were disregarded while increasing critical dependency on Russian energy – a second Nord Stream pipeline was the notorious symbol of strategic corruption. Appeasement of Moscow has benefited corrupt businesses operating in Russia and political actors profiting from the Kremlin shadow financing, while Western societies overall have been weakened.

In 2014, in response to Russia's aggression against Ukraine, US Congress adopted **Ukraine Freedom Support Act**. This law defined the policy objective of the United States as to deter further invasion of Ukraine by Russia and help Ukraine restore its sovereignty and territorial integrity through a comprehensive effort of economic sanctions, diplomacy, assistance for the people of Ukraine and the provision of military capabilities. Nevertheless, this objective has never been matched with commensurate action. As a result of disastrously insufficient efforts, Russia's aggression has not been repressed. On the contrary, Western indecision and inaction emboldened Russia to pursue its policy of genocide against Ukrainians in plain sight of the world.

The massive escalation of Russia's war on Ukraine in February 2022 was a rude awakening for many in the West, prompting a major transformation in Western Russia policy. More radical measures against

Russia were gradually introduced and Western support has become essential for the viability of Ukraine's defence efforts. What has not changed is the underlying premise of the Western response to Russia's war – Moscow must be appeased at the expense of Ukraine. Instead of committing to help Ukraine defeat Russia, the West chose to pursue appeasement under the guise of putting Ukraine in the 'best possible negotiation position', a strategy that implicitly assumed Kyiv's 'voluntary' concessions to Moscow. The only red line the West has committed itself to is the preservation of Ukraine as a sovereign state, albeit limited sovereignty.

Trump's presidency further plunged the Western-led, rules-based order – painstakingly built by generations of Western leaders before him – into self-destruct mode. Trump's pseudo-peace approach to Russia's war has been to coerce Ukraine into ceasing resistance and 'voluntarily' agreeing to Moscow's illegal demands. If Trump's upside-down values prevail, the world may find itself accepting war criminal Putin as a peacemaker, worthy of a Nobel Prize, much like Trump himself.

Russia's destruction of Ukraine continues because **Ukraine is under-supported, while Russia remains overprotected**. The longer Western response to Russia's war remains incommensurate with what is required to uphold the rules-based order, the closer we move to the collapse of the international security order.

There are two major failings at the centre of the Western policy that must be repaired if we are to stop Russia's aggression: the underestimation of Moscow's revanchist global ambitions and the refusal to recognise Russia's genocidal objective in Ukraine.

## **Russia is the Main Threat to Global Peace**

Russia's revanchist ambitions to regain the status of a global superpower have been dangerously underestimated.

The West believed that Russia's aggressive plans can be contained within Ukraine, or the former Soviet space, without affecting Western security and economic interests. Even Russia's 2021 **ultimatum to NATO** (not to Ukraine!) did not shake the Western posture of arrogant invincibility.

The West was lulled by a false belief that its high GDP makes it immune to any threat, neglecting serious problems with the capacity of its societies to resist Russia's calculated strategy to bring an end to Western dominated international order. Russia substituted its shortcomings in economic competitiveness with advantages derived from malign actions: using brutal violence abroad; weaponizing energy supplies; corrupting high-level political and business establishments of foreign countries; subverting democratic processes worldwide through state-directed propaganda, its network of influence and backing of divisive political actors; weakening its targets by exploiting organised crime; and infiltrating intelligence agents.

While the West kept ignoring Putin's transformation of Russia into an ideologically brainwashed, totalitarian and militarised society, Moscow was quietly building its infrastructure to destabilise the West and expanding its partnership with Beijing to usher in a 'new world order'. The Sino-Russian alliance forged a determined anti-Western group that is reshaping the world of international relations. Backing by this hostile axis made Russia confident enough to launch a hybrid war against the West, including by organising, financing and directing acts of terrorism and sabotage on the territory of NATO member states. NATO's deterrence is no longer unquestionable.

Trump's 28 points highlighted the gains Russia made in its pursuit of global power even while unable to claim any serious military achievements in Ukraine. Instead of being treated as an outlaw state captured by war criminals and threatening world peace, Russia is given special consideration in international relations, allowing it to act above international law and dictate its will not only to the victim of its

aggression but also to the allies of the United States, including the defensive military alliance that the US supposedly leads.

Trump's elevation of Russia reflects his long-standing public positions. The details of the proposed framework for Ukraine's surrender leave no ambiguity: in his view of global affairs, the major power must be rewarded for its aggression with the spoils of war, while a smaller nation must be punished for its resistance with humiliating concessions. This should serve as a major wake-up call for countries targeted by Trump's own aggressive claims. The appeasement of Trump will be as effective as appeasement of Putin.

Coercion of Ukraine to surrender epitomises Trump's policy to relinquish America's longstanding role as leader of the free world. His administration is treading a course of aggressive foreign policy and undermining democracy at home. Trump's vision of a 'great America' increasingly appears premised on similar ideas that underpinned the rise of Putin's regime: nurturing revanchist sentiments to justify 'might makes right' policies.

It has been clear for a very long time that Ukraine's defiance to Russia has been in the way of Trump's desire to forge a new partnership relationship between Washington and Moscow. As is evident by the 28 points, the Trump administration is willing to pay as high a price as destroying the liberal rules-based order.

First, this new attempt at realignment with the Kremlin was justified as a 'reverse-Kissinger' political strategy, intended to weaken China by detaching Moscow from Beijing. This ill-conceived policy quickly encountered the reality of the ambitious objectives for upending the world order that bind Russia and China far more strongly than any incentives the US could offer for a strategic shift.

Now, it increasingly appears that Trump's collusion with Putin to dismantle the rules-based order is designed to pave the way for carving

up the world, together with Russia and China, into spheres of influence, reminiscent of the 'Percentages Agreement' reached at the 1944 Fourth Moscow Conference. Should Ukraine fall victim to such a pact, the European Union's existence is likely to be one of the next consequences.

Western nations must finally recognise that sacrificing Ukraine's interests to Russia will not bring peace; it will pave the way for more war. The West will not only lose a capable military ally with massive experience fighting against the barbaric tactics of the Russian military but also help Moscow destroy the rules-based order and open the floodgates for more violence worldwide, with Western nations directly targeted.

## **Russia's Goal is to Make Ukrainians Russian, and to Make Ukraine Russia**

The second major reason for the Western failure to stop Russia is the refusal to recognise the true nature of Russia's criminal actions in Ukraine. It is a war of annihilation, genocide, culturecide, linguicide and ecocide.

Since 2014, Russia has sought the destruction of both the Ukrainian state and the Ukrainian nation. This genocidal objective is a primary driver of Russia's continued war on Ukraine. This is why Moscow's imperial gluttony cannot be satisfied by serving additional territory in Ukraine's southeast on the platter of appeasement.

The Russian state openly espouses the humanity-hating ideology of Russism and incites its people to commit genocide against Ukrainians through a massive state-directed propaganda machine.

A litany of harrowing Russian crimes reveal a concerted state-sponsored plan of destruction of Ukrainians: the monstrous scale, cruelty and pattern of the Russian attacks against the civilian

population; air **attacks on civilians and critical infrastructure** historically unprecedented in scale; a systematic 'human safari' tactic to **hunt down civilians by drones**; the deliberate targeting of leaders, activists, journalists, religious clergy; mass graves; **illegal deportation of children** and their consequent indoctrination to erase identity and subject them to military education; systematic vicious violence, torture, rape; a scorched-earth military sieges of cities; and more.

Western governments must stop ignoring that Russia has been implementing a deliberate, state-directed policy aimed at destroying the viability of Ukrainians as a distinct national and ethnic group. This is a means of dismantling the Ukrainian sovereign state, because the Ukrainian nation's existence is the foundation of Ukrainian statehood.

## **The West is Losing by Staying Out of the Fight**

Western political hesitation to aid Ukraine in halting Russian genocide has condemned Ukraine to endless destruction. Since Trump's reversal of American policy on Ukraine, the scale of devastation has grown exponentially.

Ukraine does not need a so-called 'peace plan' that shields the criminal Russian regime from accountability and rewards Russia with the spoils of its war under the guise of humanitarian concerns. There should be only one peace plan on the table: the full restoration of international law, which was violated by Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and its genocide against Ukrainians. This plan requires defeating Russia, and this objective is achievable. Ukraine has already proven that Russia is a giant on feet of clay.

Ukraine stands as the last warrior on the battlefield, fighting for the preservation of the liberal global order. While some Western leaders acknowledge that Ukraine is on the front lines of this shared cause,

their declarations of solidarity must be translated into robust political, economic and military action:

- Confiscating Russian sovereign assets to finance Ukraine's self-defence.
- Implementing a comprehensive economic embargo on Russia to deprive it of resources for continuing the war.
- Supplying Ukraine with long-range weapons to substantially restrict Russia's capacity to target the civilian population.
- Prosecuting Russian perpetrators of war crimes and genocide in international courts to send a clear message that justice for Ukrainians will not be used as a bargaining chip in any negotiations.
- NATO member states bordering Ukraine must start cooperating with Ukraine to jointly defend against Russian air threats.
- Launching a humanitarian military mission to protect Ukrainian civilians and infrastructure from missile and drone attacks and to mitigate the risk of a nuclear incident resulting from Russian strikes on Ukraine's civilian nuclear infrastructure, which threatens the safety of all of Europe.
- Engaging in a policy that supports the decolonisation and de-imperialization of Russia.
- Designating Russia as a state sponsor of terrorism for organising, funding and directing terrorist attacks on the territory of NATO members.
- Deploying European military personnel to protect Western and Ukrainian defence industries.
- Sending a coalition of the willing to reinforce Ukraine's self-defence military efforts.
- Offering Ukraine NATO membership.

# Defend the future

Maintaining the rules-based order requires commitment, action and the willingness to take necessary risks to defend the core values and principles on which this order is premised.

Russia is not at war with only Ukraine; it is at war with humanity. Ukraine's red lines are the boundaries of the international rules-based order. Coercing Ukraine into 'voluntarily' accepting limited sovereignty or any recognition of Russia's territorial gains will not preserve the facade of international law. Normalising Russia's aggression will encourage the Sino-Russian alliance to continue pursuing a new world order based on unfreedom. If Russia triumphs in Ukraine, it will set a precedent, encouraging wars of aggression elsewhere and paving the way for the anti-Western axis to expand its influence across Europe.

The future of the free world hinges on our collective resolve to defend it. While the American role at this critical time of human history is disheartening, a special responsibility falls on the European Union, as the main anchor of the rules-based order in the world. Our shared goal must be to defeat the aggressive Russian regime and weaken the forces seeking to dismantle world freedom.

---

*© Ariana Gic, Marko Mihkelson and Roman Sohn, 2025*