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Yalta 1945 – Between Cooperation and Rivalry:

What Lessons for Today's World Order?

Part 2

As global tensions mount, is a new Yalta-style agreement within reach? This second part of the article examines why great power cooperation remains unlikely in 2025 and whether any path forward exists for diplomacy and stability in a deeply divided world.



A New Yalta-Style Agreement? Unlikely in Today's Climate

The prospect of a new Yalta-style agreement in 2025 appears improbable due to several compounding factors:

The Ukraine Crisis and NATO Expansion

The US and EU's involvement in Ukraine's political trajectory, coupled with Russia's 2022 military special operation in Ukraine, has exacerbated tensions. NATO expansion, which Russia sees as a direct threat, has led to heightened militarisation and mutual hostility.

The current geopolitical climate is marked by deep mistrust, adversarial positions and ideological divisions

The ongoing conflict in Ukraine has significantly heightened tensions between Russia and Western nations. Ukraine's aspirations for NATO membership, highlighted by President Volodymyr Zelensky's recent statements about the necessity of joining NATO or considering nuclear rearmament to deter Russia, have been a focal point of contention. Russia perceives NATO's eastward expansion as a direct threat to its security, leading to increased militarisation and mutual hostility.

Sanctions and Economic Warfare

Western nations have imposed extensive sanctions on Russia, aiming to weaken the country. UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer has called for intensified economic measures against Russia, emphasizing the need to increase economic harm to expedite the end of the conflict in Ukraine. These sanctions have strained Russia's economy but have also reinforced Moscow's perception of Western hostility, reducing the likelihood of diplomatic resolutions.

This week, EU officials are finalising the 16th package of sanctions. However, after the sanctions have devastated the main EU economies, Brussels is considering a return to Russian gas.

Mistrust and Ideological Polarization

Unlike in 1945, when Roosevelt, Churchill, and Stalin found common ground despite their differences, today's leaders are entrenched in ideological hostility. The current geopolitical climate is marked by deep mistrust, adversarial positions and ideological divisions. The West frames Russia as a threat to be countered rather than a partner for negotiation, further diminishing prospects for cooperative agreements, as shown by EU leaders' refusal to negotiate with Putin. Trump has broken this current.

Currently, the champion of this polarization and warmongering is NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte, who delivers incendiary speeches about Russia's desire to invade Europe, even though the necessary material and human resources are lacking.

The Absence of a Unifying Threat

The Yalta Conference was driven by the necessity to defeat a common enemy—Nazi Germany. In contrast, the current international landscape lacks a unifying threat that compels great powers to collaborate. Geopolitical competition and conflicting interests dominate the agenda, making a diplomatic breakthrough akin to Yalta unlikely.

The Demonisation of Russia in Western Discourse

The conflict in Ukraine has led to instances across Europe where cultural, academic, and economic ties with Russia have been severed, affecting Russian artists, academics, and cultural figures. Here are some concrete examples:

Cultural Sphere: There have been cancellations of Russian performances and calls within the art world to cancel cultural partnerships with Russian institutions, such as the Hermitage Museum in Amsterdam.

Academic Sphere: The severance with all Russian universities and research institutions' collaborations and ties in Europe took place within two weeks after the beginning of the special operation in Ukraine without any debate. This includes a course on Dostoyevsky was cancelled in Italy. In the U.S. there happened a debate on whether or not the ties with academic institutions should be cut off.

Economic Sphere: There have been widespread boycotts of Russian and Belarusian businesses, affecting various sectors and leading to economic isolation.

These actions, while often intended as political statements against the Russian government's actions, have also impacted individuals and entities not directly involved in the conflict.

This phenomenon has fostered an 'us versus them' mentality, fuelling widespread Russophobia, particularly within the media's televised debates. Individuals holding nuanced views that did not align with this sentiment were excluded from participating in these discussions.

In this context of Russophobia, a diplomatic breakthrough akin to Yalta remains unlikely.

Ways Forward: Is There Any Hope for Cooperation?

While a new Yalta agreement may not be foreseeable, diplomacy remains the only viable path to stability. I would suggest a few potential steps:

Revisiting the Principle of Indivisible Security: Instead of security based on dominance, a new framework acknowledging mutual security concerns could help rebuild trust.

Re-establishing Diplomatic Dialogue: Channels of communication between Russia and Western powers, especially in Europe, must be urgently restored to engage in fruitful collaboration toward a viable peaceful and collaborative future.

Rethinking NATO's Role: If NATO expansion continues to provoke conflict, alternative security arrangements should be considered, or NATO should simply be extinguished.

A Focus on Economic and Cultural Engagement: Rebuilding economic and academic ties could help reduce hostility and build trust over time.

In sum, the world of 2025 is vastly different from 1945, but history shows that even bitter rivals can find common ground when their interests align. The challenge today is whether global leaders can overcome ideological rigidity in favour of pragmatic cooperation. Without it, the world risks a continued slide into division and conflict, rather than the spirit of Yalta that once aimed to ensure lasting peace.

Ricardo Martins, February 08, 2025

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