

Nord Stream 2 Pipeline: Energy Transport Routes Its Strategic Importance and Conflicts

(Translated)

International agencies reported last Tuesday, 22/2/2022, the news of German Chancellor Olaf Scholz's announcement of suspending the approval of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline with Russia, and his warning of possible additional sanctions, and that this suspension was a response to Moscow's recognition of the two separatist regions in eastern Ukraine. (Al-Hurra Agency; France 24). The same Chancellor had announced on 17/12/ 2021 his refusal to cancel the operation of the gas pipeline Nord Stream 2 or link it to the Ukrainian crisis, describing it as an economic project that has nothing to do with politics. (German DW Agency).

This news comes in the midst of the ongoing global conflict over Ukraine. Although it is much less important than the issue of the aforementioned conflict, in terms of the weight of its parties, which are major countries, and in terms of being a vital conflict that will have an impact on the international situation, rather on the entire world order, and in terms of its open repercussions on international polarization and alignments, and on various possibilities to the limit of contradictions. Despite this, it is still very important, as the importance of energy; oil and gas, their sources and transportation methods, and their impact on international relations and situations.

Energy and its paths are a thorny and complex subject, the subject of studies, and the subject of conflicts with all the tools and possibilities of political conflict, and sometimes with traditional wars, and it can develop into something more dangerous. Therefore, this comment will be limited to the political and strategic importance of energy transfer routes in general, and of Nord Stream 2 or North Stream 2 in particular. To demonstrate the extent of the conflict over it, and its importance in terms of the economic power it provides to its beneficiaries, and Russia's political influence over Europe, and the weakening of the American grip over it.

The importance of oil and gas transportation routes

Oil and gas are still one of the most important sources of energy in the world today, especially for industrialized and developed countries. For factories and machines, for military means, spacecraft, and other means of local and international transportation, by land, sea and air, as well as for heating, lighting and other domestic and civil uses. These sources are not just commercial goods, but rather strategic goods, and the need for them today is like the body's need for blood, and the continuation of obtaining them and their flow may require igniting wars for them and shedding of blood. Therefore, the major countries, especially America, dominated the countries that possess large energy reserves, considering them as global commodities, because of their impact on international peace and security, and because of the urgent need for it and the competition for it, it has become a cause of international conflicts over these countries.

This energy provided to the countries financial wealth, which stimulated the works of construction, trade and consumption. It gave them a prestige among the countries, and provided the countries that import it increased production, competition, economic strength and control. Therefore, it was of great importance to the two parties to continue the production and export and have access to places of consumption. Countries that are unable to produce or sell are economically declining, and those who are unable to obtain sufficient energy, its production and progress is hampered, and their international standing declines, which is considered a security threat to exporting and importing countries alike. Hence the term "energy security"; which means securing extraction and production, export and arrival, including securing transport and supply routes to and from all the world's continents and countries. Gas had a

distinct importance over oil, so its transcontinental pipelines were called the new energy arteries.

Therefore, securing transmission lines was a political act, not just commercial or economic, and its importance exceeded that of the energy itself. These supplies add complications to the oil and gas trade, due to the entry of additional parties other than the exporter and importer; they are the countries through which this trade passes on land or water.

Oil and gas wars

The various lists of oil-producing countries show that the United States and Russia alternate as the most energy producing countries, followed by Saudi Arabia. In terms of consumption, America comes at the top of the list, then China, and they are also the most importers of it, even though they are among the largest producers, followed by India, Japan, Saudi Arabia and Russia. As for natural gas, the largest countries in terms of production for 2019 are, in order: America, Russia, Iran, China... and the largest in terms of exports are, in order: Qatar, Australia, Malaysia, Nigeria, Indonesia, Algeria, then Russia.

In terms of consumption, America comes first, followed by Russia, and China comes lagging behind. The total consumption of the European Union countries comes after America and before Russia. The countries that have the most influence in global trade competitions, and that receive interest in political conflicts in the matter of oil and gas, are the countries that are the most exporting or importing of any of them. The most important exporting countries are the countries of the Arab Gulf region, led by Saudi Arabia, followed by Iraq for oil, and Qatar and Russia for natural gas. The most important importing countries are the United States, European Union countries and China. Natural gas was discovered at the beginning of this century in the eastern Mediterranean in huge quantities, which made the region the focus of the major countries with the aim of imposing influence and seizing its wealth.

Therefore, oil and gas wars in the sense of economic planning and political confrontation for the sake of progress and precedence, or control and extension of influence, are mainly made by the major countries, i.e., the United States, Russia, China and the major European Union countries, and the exporting and transit countries benefit from this economically and politically. The most important conflicts over these projects today are between America and Russia. China is a candidate to be an important party in it, especially after its globally competitive economic and technological rise, and after it started implementing its huge global project: the Belt and Road Initiative, which is also called: One Belt, One Road. One of the most prominent features of these wars today is the huge projects to build roads and means of energy transportation.

The most important of these projects are: the Nabucco Line Project, the South Stream Project, the Turkish Stream, the Blue Stream, the South Caucasus Line, the TANAP Line, the TAP Line, the North Stream 1 and the North Stream 2, and the last two are Nord Stream 1 and Nord Stream 2.

Below is a brief description of these projects

Nabucco line

The idea of the Nabucco line appeared in 2002, which is to extend a 3,300 km pipeline to transport gas from Central Asia and the Caucasus, via pipelines from Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan to Turkmenistan, which is the main supplier of the gas pipeline. Then it heads west through the Caspian Sea to Azerbaijan, which also supplies the pipeline with gas, then continues through the Caucasus to Georgia, then Turkey, which it crosses to Europe, where it continues on its path to Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary and Austria. In doing so, it avoids Russian territory, as well as reducing imports from it.

This line is one of the clearest projects in denoting the intensity of competition and economic and political conflict. Its establishment has been proposed by European countries with the aim of maintaining energy security for Europe. This is because Europe's need to import energy is urgent, and it is dependent on Russia to a large extent, which provides the latter with the ability to pressure it on many issues and situations. The idea of this line is to supply gas to

Europe from countries other than Russia, without passing through Russian territory. The belief in the need for it increased due to Russia's repeated disputes with Ukraine, the most important crossing for Russian energy to Europe at the time, and the resulting Russian pressures that hurt Europe, such as the gas crisis that erupted between them in 2006 and the conflict between Russia and Ukraine in 2009 in the winter;

Which led to the interruption of gas supplies to Europe. Therefore, the Nabucco pipeline was urgent to reduce dependence on Russian gas. One of America's goals from this project was to strike Russia, so, it sought to implement it. The European Commission proceeded in that, and provided it with studies and money, and NATO supported it. An agreement to implement it was signed in July 2009. It is no secret that this project is part of the Russian-American conflict; this is why Russia confronted it forcefully and aborted it. Before that, the United States and some European countries had thwarted a huge Russian project to supply Europe with Russian gas, the South Stream pipeline.

South Stream Project

It is one of the most important Russian pipelines to transport Russian gas to southern and central Europe via the Black Sea and Bulgaria. One of Russia's motives for building this line was to avoid Ukrainian territory and ensure that the flow of Russian gas to the European countries concerned would not be interrupted, due to the recurrent conflicts between Russia and Ukraine, especially the 2009 conflict, as well as to fight the Nabucco pipeline, which aims to hit its gas exports.

It was planned that this line would extend with a length of 930 km across the Black Sea, with a capacity of 63 billion cubic meters annually, distributed over four pipelines, supplying Bulgaria, Hungary, Austria, Italy, Croatia and Serbia. Despite the importance of this line to Bulgaria and its economic return, it stopped its extension through its territory under pressure from America and the European Commission. Then the strong conflict between this line and the Nabucco line ended with the failure of the two lines.

These conflicts between Russia and America revealed the division of European countries regarding these projects, according to their different interests and fears. Although Europe's need for Russian gas enables Russia to put pressure on it, Europe cannot go along with America in confronting Russia because it is the one affected by stopping its flow to it. In addition, Europe does not feel secure from America, and realizes that its liberation from Russian pressure will be in the interest of America more than it is in its interest, and it may be more dangerous for it.

The Turkish Stream and the Blue Stream

After the failure of the South Stream line appeared, Russia was quick to announce the Turkish Stream line. This is in order to preserve Russia's economy and interests, by continuing the flow of its gas to southern and eastern Europe, and to confront America and some European countries in these political wars. The idea of the Turkish Stream is based on the transfer of gas from Russia to Turkey through the Black Sea without passing through a third country, and then crossing the Turkish border to Greece to be then distributed in Europe. This project is of great economic and political interest for Turkey as well.

As for the Blue Stream: it is a pipeline with 1213 km in length, which supplies Turkey with gas from the Russian mainland to the Turkish mainland directly via the Black Sea, avoiding passage in the territory of a third country. Pumping began in 2003, and it works with another line called the Balkan Line that passes from Russia through the territories of Ukraine, Moldova, Romania and Bulgaria. The two lines are for Turkish consumption. After Russia confirmed that the South Stream pipeline had been obstructed, Putin announced in 2014 that he would increase the amount of gas passing to Turkey through the Blue Stream. It is as if he was alluding to Bulgaria that it is the loser by submitting to America by preventing the passage of the South Stream line through its territory.

South Caucasus, TANAP and TAP lines

It is a series of three different pipelines or projects for the supply of natural gas, which were built in different periods, and whose pipelines were connected to each other to reach from Baku in Azerbaijan to eastern and southern Europe. The first of them is the South Caucasus line, starting from Baku on the Caspian Sea to reach Turkey via Georgia. The second is the TANAP pipeline, that is, the gas pipeline across Anatolia, which starts from the Georgian-Turkish border, and crosses Turkey from east to west. The third is the TAB, i.e., the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline, which starts from the Turkish-Greek border and crosses Greece to Europe, crossing the Adriatic Sea to the west. These three lines, from their beginning in Baku to their end in Europe after crossing the Adriatic, are called the Southern Passage.

This series of pipelines are a competitor to Russia's pipelines, and leads to rivalry between Russia and Azerbaijan; this is because the importing countries prefer to diversify the sources of gas imports, so as not to remain hostage to the pressures of one source, which imposes the price it sees. Europe suffers from the size of its need for Russian gas, and it has a great interest in finding additional options. Turkey is the second country in importing Russian gas after Germany. Therefore - even though it gets the price for the transfer of Russian gas through its territory - it had great interests in diversifying its gas sources.

Nord Stream 1 and Nord Stream 2

They are two of Russia's largest projects to supply gas to Europe. Their lines pass from Russia to Germany through the Baltic Sea, and they are important in political and strategic planning because of their impact on international relations and political conflicts between America, Russia and Europe, and between the various countries of Europe. America says that these projects give Russia great influence over Europe, and therefore it is making great efforts to thwart them. The countries of Europe differ among themselves in this regard, and the countries that have a need and interest in importing Russian gas are subject to America's pressure on them and the sanctions it threatens or imposes on those who contribute to the implementation of these projects. In fact, these projects achieve vital economic and political interests for Russia.

One of the Russian goals for these lines is the establishment of a huge network of gas pipelines in several countries or regions of the world, in order to have a flexible infrastructure, with alternatives in gas export operations. One of its most important goals in the Northern (Nord) Stream lines is to dispense with Ukraine in transporting Russian gas to Europe, because the political positions and interests of the two countries are subject to many discrepancies and contradictions. Therefore, Russia seeks to harm and weaken it.

Before becoming two lines, the Nord Stream line follows a northern route to Europe, feeding mainly its northern countries. It is known by several names, including the Nord Stream, the Northern European Gas Pipeline, also known as the German-Russian Gas Pipeline, and the Baltic Sea Gas Pipeline. It is the longest undersea pipeline. It starts from Vyborg in Russia on the Baltic Sea and ends in Greifswald on the German coast with a length of 1,224 km. Its annual capacity is 55 billion cubic meters evenly distributed over two parallel branches. The extension of the pipelines of one of the two branches began in April 2010, and it began operating in November 2011. Then the second branch was extended and began operating in November 2012. In 2011 studies appeared aimed at supplying the energy of these two branches with two additional branches; third and fourth, increasing the total annual capacity to 110 m3. Thus the names Nord Stream 1 and Nord Stream 2 appeared.

The implementation of Nord Stream 2 began in January 2018, and it was expected to start operating in the middle of 2020, but America fought this project and obstructed it by imposing sanctions on companies and countries that contribute to its implementation. It was also opposed by many Central and Eastern European countries, arguing that this line would increase Russia's influence in the region. Thus, the Nord Stream 2 project led to a strong political war between America and Russia, and to the division of the positions of European countries regarding it. Germany stood at the forefront of countries supporting it, rejecting US

pressure to cancel it, so the date for its completion was repeatedly postponed. The last expectation for its completion was before the end of 2021.

Russia was, and still is, looking for strategic alternatives to enhance the diversity of its gas access outlets to Europe. Including the construction of the Nord Stream gas pipeline, which links Russia and Germany, and then crosses to Bulgaria, Serbia, Hungary and Austria, in addition to Greece and Italy. With this line, Russia wanted to achieve two goals at the same time. The first: to gradually reduce the volume of gas that passes to Europe through Ukraine. The second: to punish Ukraine by downplaying its importance as a major transit country for Russian gas.

European countries are afraid of Nord Stream 2 because of its expected economic and strategic effects on countries that depend, or will depend almost entirely on Russian gas, in the east and center of the continent.

The news about the escalation of the US-Russian conflict over the Nord Stream 2 project and its danger are innumerable, for example, the statement by former US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on 21/9/2020, that Washington is about to form an alliance to obstruct the implementation of the Nord Stream 2 project. The Russian representative, Mikhail Sheremet, responded that the United States' efforts to obstruct the Nord Stream 2 project undermines the modern international economic relations' system, and thus open a direct path to slipping into a new cold war, endangering the peaceful existence of humanity. The Russian parliamentarian stressed that the United States is politicizing this project for a very clear goal, which is to reap profits and correct its failed economic policy at the expense of European countries by selling US liquefied gas to it. (Al-A'ahd website).

Washington has long threatened to impose sanctions on everyone who participates in this project, and warns them of far-reaching consequences. Those who reject these threats have commented that they are very dangerous. The Kremlin and Russian officials described the US actions in this regard as worrying, and the sanctions and illegal. Germany has always shown its annoyance and firm rejection of it, which led to the talk about the dilemma of facing President Biden upon taking office, which is that the new US administration wants to return to close cooperation with Germany, but Nord Stream 2 remains a stumbling block in relations between the two countries.

The grumbling, disagreement, and conflicting interests between America, Russia and European countries have reached an advanced stage that foreshadowed an economic battle between America and Germany. America threatened to punish German companies, under the pretext that it gives Moscow economic and political influence over Europe, and undermines the energy security of the European Union. European statements were issued at high levels confirming that European energy policy is determined within Europe, and not in the United States. The Germans and the Russians confirmed that all companies working on the project, including the European ones, are determined to complete its implementation. In fact, German Chancellor Schulz announced just two months ago that Nord Stream 2 is an economic project that has nothing to do with the ongoing conflict in Ukraine.

Therefore, his announcement a few days ago that the project was suspended is a great victory for the United States and its president, Biden. The possibility of canceling this suspension remains valid and awaited. It is expected that there are trends in Germany and several European countries that refuse to cancel this project, Nord Stream 2, and therefore reject this declaration issued in the loud, stressful and unusual international and regional circumstances.

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