

Terry Su

## Ukraine war: doing US bidding on Russia could lead Europe into new ‘Suez moment’

- If we are in a second cold war, as some have suggested, Europe could be the first casualty, just as it was during the first Cold War
- Europe is in danger of losing its global political identity, becoming even more dependent on the US and risking a slide into untold levels of poverty

Published: 1:00am, 13 Oct, 2022



A Norwegian Home Guard soldier stands guard at the Karst gas processing plant in Rogaland, Norway, on October 3. Norway, now the biggest supplier of gas to Europe, has increased security around its oil installations following allegations of sabotage on Nord Stream’s Baltic Sea pipelines.

In the Hollywood film *Forrest Gump*, the title character quotes his mother as saying “life is like a box of chocolates – you never know what you’re going to get”. That line struck me again when the news broke that holes were found in the Nord Stream 1 and 2 pipelines on September 26 and natural gas leaked as a result, with the pictures of a huge swirl on the sea surface quickly spreading online.

It was sabotage. All parties condemned it and fingers were pointed, but the blame game has gone nowhere, as could be expected. Soon afterwards, there were reports of “cable sabotage” in

Germany's railway network. Then, the Kerch bridge linking Crimea and the Russian mainland was bombed, followed by Russia's barrage of missiles on Ukrainian cities reportedly causing civilian casualties and electricity disruptions. Goodness knows what will be next.

It seems that nothing is off-limits now. The world is rightly worried about the ramifications, especially in light of fears that the escalation could trigger the use of nuclear weapons, as Russia has repeatedly threatened. On October 6, US President Joe Biden spoke of the highest risk of a nuclear "Armageddon" since the 1962 Cuban missile crisis.

The geopolitical picture got clearer when the US Secretary of State Antony Blinken spoke on September 30 of the Nord Stream pipeline breaches. "It's a tremendous opportunity to once and for all remove the dependence on Russian energy", he said, adding "that's very significant and that offers tremendous strategic opportunity for the years to come."

His remarks were reminiscent of Winston Churchill's 1946 "Iron Curtain" speech about the Cold War, in the sense that the Nord Stream pipeline explosions could symbolise the final nail in the coffin for hopes of EU-Russian reconciliation.

That being the case, the consequences for Europe are dire. If we are actually in a second cold war, as historian Niall Ferguson put it, Europe could be its first victim, just as it was during the first Cold War.

Few realise that the former Soviet Union was not the first casualty of the Cold War – rather, it was the British and French imperial inheritance. Their empires were dismembered in the immediate aftermath of World War II, culminating in the Suez crisis in 1956 when the invasion of Egypt by allied Israeli, British and French forces was thwarted by heavy diplomatic and economic pressure from the United States.

The result was that the US presence in former European colonies increased as part of the overarching framework of the Cold War against the Soviet Union, which also carved out some spheres of influence among the newly independent nations. Europe as a whole was reduced to a group of second-tier powers but mostly maintained the status of developed countries in terms of material living standards and global prestige.

Now, hope of European reconciliation with Russia is fading as the war on Ukrainian soil drags on and the high cost of oil and gas weighs down production and competitiveness. Europe is in danger of losing its global political identity, becoming ever more dependent on Washington and possibly sinking into levels of poverty never envisaged before.

Europe needs to ask itself one question. What if its manufacturing capabilities are weakened as a result of the above factors and forced to move to the Americas and East Asia, economic blocs that are manufacturing hubs, target markets and, not insignificantly, free of geopolitical disruptions?

I have long been of the opinion that the European Union, under the leadership of France and Germany, holds dear an unspoken desire for integration with Russia to uphold Europe's independent standing on the world stage. However, the pace of geopolitical developments seems to be outstripping any armchair theorising, with Washington's determination to push the envelope in its relations with Russia and China and to prod Europe to follow suit being mostly responsible for this turn of events.

Now, with Russia unlikely to be destroyed despite being foiled in Ukraine and largely shunned internationally, it is time for Europe to get over its cold feet and think of getting down to brass tacks. Just as the world's attention has been drawn to the looming prospect of the "Ukrainisation of

Taiwan” in East Asia, it is becoming clear that the “Ukrainisation of Europe” is not an unthinkable scenario, to the heavy detriment of Europe’s interests.

That is probably why former German chancellor Angela Merkel has publicly appealed to avoid fully severing ties with Moscow, even at a time when Russia is seen as a pariah state by the US and other countries worldwide. She said on October 6 that “a future European security architecture within international law will meet the requirements” only if it involves Russia, adding that “as long as we haven’t achieved that, the Cold War is not really over, either”.

Ferguson caused a stir last year when he said China successfully taking Taiwan by force could signal the end of the American empire, calling it a “Suez moment” for the US. The irony is that, instead of Taiwan, such a moment could well be a replay in and for Europe, starting now.

The question is whether Europe can afford to submit to its fate this time. If not, doesn’t that warrant a political Nord Stream plan, which Merkel has all but requested?

**Terry Su is president of Lulu Derivation Data Ltd, a Hong Kong-based online publishing house and think tank specialising in geopolitics**

<https://www.scmp.com/comment/opinion/article/3195550/ukraine-war-doing-us-bidding-russia-could-lead-europe-new-suez>