

Energy Wars: Outing the Nord Stream Saboteurs

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When news first emerged over explosions endured by the Nord Stream pipelines, known collectively as Nord Stream 1 and Nord Stream 2, an army of guessers was mobilised. The accusation that Russia had done it seemed counterintuitive, given that the Russian state company Gazprom is a majority shareholder of Nord Stream 1 and sole owner of Nord Stream 2. But this less than convenient fact did not discourage those from the Moscow-is-behind everything School of Thinking. "It's pretty predictable and predictably stupid to express such versions," snarled Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov.

The [first reports](#) noted three leaks in both the Nord Stream 1 and Nord Stream 2 pipeline systems. A fourth was subsequently revealed. Then came news that the first explosion had taken place in a Russian built section of the pipeline. *Der Spiegel* summed up the various questions. Was Moscow behind it? Or the United States, which had always been implacably opposed to the project? And what of Ukraine or perhaps "rogue" agents? For those wishing for a more savoury sauce, there was babbling that Mossad might have been behind it.

Statements were issued in number, some more equivocal than others in attributing blame. The Council of the European Union, in promising a "robust and united response" to the incidents, [declared](#) that "all available information indicates those leaks are the result of a deliberate act."

Gerhard Schindler, former chief of the German Federal Intelligence Service, [insisted](#) that the damage, inflicted at depths of 80 metres in the Baltic Sea, required "sophisticated technical and organisational capabilities that clearly point to a state actor." Russia, he continued, was the only power that could be seriously considered "especially since it stands to gain most from this act of sabotage."

In the black and white world of most Ukrainian officials, the damage had to have been inflicted by Moscow. An advisor to the Ukrainian president, Mykhailo Polodyak, [called](#) the incident "a terrorist attack planned by Russia and an act of aggression towards [the EU]."

In this bluster and bombast, it was striking to note the absence of any alternatives. Over the course of last summer, Washington had issued a pointed warning to several of its European allies that the Nord Stream 1 and 2 gas pipelines would be the subject of threat, even potential attack. The nature of such warnings, based on US intelligence assessments, was vague. The hostility of the Biden administration was not.

In the scheme of things, the outing of the US role in this affair by the establishment's tolerated contrarian is unsurprising and far from stunning. According to Seymour Hersh, [the culprits](#) were well trained deep-water divers who had gone through the US Navy's Diving and Salvage Center. Under the cover of a NATO exercise named BALTOPS 22, the divers planted devices that would be remotely triggered three months later.

The claims made in the article were coolly dismissed by various officials. White House spokesperson Adrienne Watson responded with a swat. "This is false and complete fiction." Ditto the waspish spokesperson for the Central Intelligence Agency, Tammy Thorp: "This claim is completely and utterly false." For his part, Biden accused Russia for "pumping out disinformation and lies".

But as Hersh writes, the decision to sabotage the pipelines had few opponents in Washington's national security community. Weaning Europe off its dependence on Russian energy supplies has been a goal near and dear to US policy makers. The issue lay in how best to execute the action without clear attribution.

To keep the cloak of secrecy firmly fastened, resort was made to US Navy divers rather than units from the Special Operations Command. In the case of the latter, covert operations must be reported to Congress. The Gang of Eight, comprising the US Senate and House leadership, must also be briefed. No such protocols exist in the context of the Navy.

Even now the denials continue. On February 19, National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby flatly rejected the suggestion that the United States was behind the explosions. "It's a completely false story. There is no truth to it, Shannon," [he told](#) the host Shannon Bream on *Fox News Sunday*. "Not a shred of it. It is not true. The United States, and no proxies of the United States, had anything to do with that, nothing."

When pressed by Bream on whether there was an obligation to inform Congress of such an operation, Kirby replied that "we keep Congress informed appropriately of things both classified and unclassified. But I can tell you now, regardless of the notification process, there was no US involvement in this."

The European Commission's Press Officer Andrea Masini has [opted for the line](#) that revelations from an investigative reporter are less trustworthy than official investigations.

"We do not comment on speculations about the perpetrators of sabotage against the Nord Stream pipelines. The only basis for any possible response can be the outcome of an official investigation. Such investigations are the responsibility of the competent authorities of the Member States concerned."

Hersh's revelations, drawn from a source with intimate knowledge of the sabotage operations, and the brimming hostility Washington has shown towards cheap Russian natural gas and its nexus with the European energy market, seem far from speculative. The plotters have been outed, and what an inglorious bunch they look.

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