



## **Seymour Hersh: How America Took Out The Nord Stream Pipeline**

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**FABIAN SCHEIDLER (FS):** Welcome to this broadcast, my name is Fabian Scheidler. On September 26, 2022, the Nord Stream natural gas pipeline from Russia to Germany was largely destroyed by several explosions in the Baltic Sea. The world renowned investigative journalist Seymour Hersh has published a detailed article based on an anonymous source claiming that the U.S. government was responsible for the attack, with the help of Norwegian forces. He will join us in a minute. Hersh has been one of the most influential investigative journalists in the world for more than half a century. In 1970, he received the Pulitzer Prize for exposing U.S. war crimes in the village of My Lai in Vietnam, which caused a major international outcry. He also covered the Watergate scandal for the New York Times. In 2003/2004 he broke the story about the U.S. torture practices in the prison of Abu Ghraib in Iraq, for which he received the renowned Polk award. Welcome, Seymour Hersh.

**SEYMOUR HERSH (SH):** Hello.

**FS:** Please start to lay out your findings in detail. What happened precisely according to your source, who was involved and what were the motives behind it.

**SH:** What I've done is simply explain the obvious. It just was a story that was begging to be told. In late September of 2022 eight bombs were supposed to go off, six went off under the water near the Island of Bornholm in the Baltic Sea, in the area where it is rather shallow. They destroyed three of the four major pipelines in the Nord Stream 1 and 2. Nord Stream 1 has been feeding fuel gas for many years at very low prices. I guess if the second pipeline, Nord Stream 2, had gone into business - it was a new one, which had been stopped by German sanctions - that there would have been enough fuel to sustain not only cheap natural

gas but also that Germany could even resell part of it and make profit. It was just a great source of low cost fuel and very reliable.

And then both pipelines were blown up, and the question was why and who did it. On February 7, 2022, in the build up to the war in Ukraine, the President of the United States Joe Biden, at a press conference at the White House with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, said that they could stop Nord Stream 2.

**FS:** The exact wording from Joe Biden was: “If Russia invades there will no longer be a Nord Stream 2, we will bring an end to it.” And when a reporter asked how exactly he intended to do it given that the project was within the control of Germany, Biden just said: “I promise we will be able to do it.”

**SH:** His Under Secretary of State Victoria Nuland, who was deeply involved in what happened in what they call the Maidan Revolution in 2014, had some similar language a couple of weeks earlier.

**FS:** You say that the decision to take out the pipeline was taken even earlier by President Biden. You lay out the story from the beginning, chronologically from December 2021, when the National Security advisor Jake Sullivan convened, according to your piece, a meeting of the newly formed task force from The Joint Chiefs of Staff, the CIA, the State and the Treasury Departments. You write, “Sullivan intended for the group to come up with a plan for the destruction of the two Nord Stream pipelines.”

**SH:** This group initially was convened in December to study the problem. They brought in the CIA and so on, they were meeting in a very secret office. Right next door to the White House, there's an office building that's called the executive office building. Where they were meeting. And it's important to say where it was, because that's the place you're not supposed to know about. It was across the street, the White House has offices called the executive office building. The White House is a compound, there's a compound. It has a fence around it now, bigger and higher than ever. It used to be an open place, in the old days, you could walk in and knock on the door until about World War One, I think. Anyway, there's an office building next door that's connected underground through a tunnel.

And at the top of it is a meeting place for a secret group, an outside group of advisors called the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board. They meet on the more or less hidden top floor in the building. You wouldn't know it's there. It's not marked, but there's a passageway.

I only reported that to let the people in the White House know that I do know something. So the meeting was convened to study the problem: What are we going to do if Russia is going to war? This was three months before the war, before Christmas of 2021. It was a high level group, it probably had a different name, I just called it the interagency group, I don't know the formal name if there was one. It was the CIA and the National Security Agency, which

monitors and intercepts communications, the State Department and the Treasury Department, which supplies money, and probably a few other groups that were involved. The Joint Chiefs of Staff had a representation as well.

The big question they had was to give recommendations about what to do about stopping Russia, measures that are either reversible, like more sanctions and economic pressure, or irreversible, kinetic things [imitates sound of explosion]. What I can't do, what I cannot do for you is indicate anything about what I learned specifically about any particular meeting, because I have to protect my source. My job is to write what I can without giving any clue as to who's talking to me.

**FS:** In the article, you wrote that in early 2022 the CIA working group reported back to Sullivan's interagency group and they said, "we have a way to blow up the pipelines".

**SH:** They did have a way. There were people there who understood what we call in America "mine warfare". In the United States Navy, there are groups that go into submarines, there's also one command about nuclear engineering. And there is a mining command. Underground mining is very important and we have skilled miners. Probably the most important place for training miners is in this little resort town called Panama City in the middle of nowhere in Florida. [If anybody knows the geography, on the Gulf of Mexico, below Alabama, this is not the place where you want to spend your career [laughs].]

We train very good people there and we use them. Miners are very important, you get clogged entries into ports, they can blow up things in the way. They can also blow up if we don't like a certain country's underwater pipelines for oil, we can blow them up too. It's not always good things they do but they're very secretive. For the group at the White House it was clear they could blow up the pipelines. There's an explosive called C4, which is incredibly powerful, devastating particularly with the amount they use. You can control and operate it remotely with underwater sonar devices. They send very low frequency signals. So it was possible and they told the White House that by early January, because two or three weeks later the Under Secretary of State Victoria Nuland said, we can do it. I think this was January 20. And then the President, with your Chancellor, said on February 7 as well that we could do it. Your Chancellor said nothing specific, he was vague. But a question that I would ask Scholz, if I had a parliamentary hearing, is this: Did the President tell you about this? Did he tell you at that time why he was so confident he could blow it up? We didn't have a plan yet, but we knew we had the capability to do it.

**FS:** Which role did Norway play in the operation?

**SH:** Well, Norway is a great seaman nation, and they have underground energy. They're also very anxious to increase the amount of natural gas they can sell to Western Europe and Germany. And they have done that, they've increased their export. So for economic reasons, why not join with the U.S.? They also have a residual dislike of Russia.

**FS:** In your article you write that the Secret Service and the Navy of Norway were involved and you say that Sweden and Denmark were sort of briefed but not told everything.

**SH:** The way it was put to me is: If you didn't tell them you didn't need to tell them. In other words, you were doing what you were doing and they knew what you were doing and they understood what was going on, but maybe nobody ever said yes. I worked on that issue very much with the people I was talking to. The bottom line is: To do this mission, the Norwegians had to find the right place. The divers that were being trained in Panama City could go to 300 feet underground without a heavy diving tank, only with a mixture of oxygen and nitrogen and helium. The Norwegians found us a place off Bornholm Island in the Baltic that was only 260 feet deep, so they could operate. They would have to return slowly, there was a decompression chamber, and we used the Norwegian submarine hunter. It's not part of the original make up, but we flew one in and put it on. And only two divers were used for the four pipelines. And I love all those people coming out who do what they call 'open source intelligence', saying: Well, this couldn't have happened. That couldn't have happened. And the first thing you do when you're planning this kind of an operation, you leave enough breadcrumbs. If you remember the children's story, you leave enough breadcrumbs for them to be able to write, as a couple already have, that this couldn't have happened because we monitor this and it was not there.

One problem was how to deal with those people who monitor the Baltic Sea. It is very thoroughly monitored, and there's a great deal of openly available information, so we took care of this, there were three or four different people for that. And what we then did is really simple. Every summer for 21 years our Navy Sixth Fleet, which has control of the Mediterranean and also the Baltic Sea, [I mean it's a fleet. We have six fleets. There's a three-star admiral fleet, another fleet is based in the Gulf, another fleet is in the West Coast. I'm just saying that it's just like a headquarters; a command. And that command agreed - I know more about this than I'm going to tell you or write - they agreed that in the next summer, they would have] an exercise for NATO Navies in the Baltic (BALTOPS). And we'd bring a Navy carrier or large ships around, it was a very open thing, the Russians certainly knew about it, we did publicly. For the first time in history, the Mining Command, which was the bottom of the pecking order in the Navy - when you went to the Navy, the Navy Academy, you had to beg somebody, an officer, to go serve in the Mining Command. It's not very glamorous there under the sea and nobody cares about them. And the miners are all a small, insular community. And we know who the good ones are and you don't see that command in movies or on television. They just don't do it. They're not SEALs. They're not Navy SEALs. They consider SEALs to be like swimmers. But they're not. And they won't talk. They're very safe and they haven't talked. And I'm sure they don't like what I've written about Panama City. I began my article by describing their headquarters there in this rinky-dink town; people go there to go fishing. Anyway, it had 11,000 people till about a decade ago, when the tourist industry grew. It was just a small town-nothing where this big operation was. Great cover, if you will. Anyway, as I described, on that particular day, for the

first time in its history, the Baltic Sea NATO operation had a new program. It was going to have an exercise in dropping mines and finding mines.

And in this one for the first time in history the Baltic Sea NATO operation had a new program. It was going to have an exercise in dropping mines and finding mines for 10 or 12 days. 8 or 10 nations sent out mining teams and one group would drop the mine and another mining group from their country would go hunt and blow it up. So you had a period where there's things blowing up. And in that time the Norwegians could recover deep sea divers. The two pipelines run about a mile apart, they're under the dirt a little but they're not hard to get to and they had practised this. It didn't take more than a few hours to plant the bombs.

**FS:** So this was in June 2022?

**SH:** Yes, they did it around 10 days into June at the end of the exercise, but at the last minute the White House got nervous. The President said I'm afraid of doing it. He changed his mind and gave them the order that he wanted the right to bomb any time, to set the bombs off anytime remotely by us. You do it with just a regular sonar, actually a Raytheon build, you fly over and drop a cylinder down. It sends a low frequency signal, you can describe it as a flute sound tone, you can make different frequencies. But the worry was that one of the bombs if left in the water too long would not work, and two did not, they only got three of the four pipelines. [And by the way, it's not just one bomb. The pipelines are covered by a steel cover to protect them from the elements and another protection of a concrete cover, too. You had to first blow away the concrete or you had to have a force strong enough to blow away first the concrete and then the steel pipeline. And one of the bombs didn't work because whatever happened, salinity or what you will.] So there was a panic inside the group to find the right means, and we actually had to go to other intelligence agencies that I didn't write about.

**FS:** And so what happened then? They placed it, they found a way to control it remotely ...

**SH:** Joe Biden decided not to blow them up, it was in early June, five months into the war, but then in September he decided to do it. I'll tell you something. The operational people, the people who do kinetic things for the United States, do what the President says and they initially thought this was a useful weapon that he could use in negotiations.

But at some point, once the Russians went in and then when the operation was done, this became increasingly odious to the people who did it. These are people well trained, they are in the highest level of secret intelligence agencies. They turned on the project, they thought this was an insane thing to do. And within a week or three or four days after the bombing, after they did what they were ordered to, there was a lot of anger and hostility. This is obviously reflected in the fact that I'm learning so much about it.

And I'll tell you something else. The people in America and Europe who build pipelines know what happened. I'm telling you something important. The people who own companies that build pipelines know the story. I didn't get the story from them but I learned quickly they

know. I'm just telling you something: It's there for the taking. You can't hide blowing up a pipeline.

**FS:** Let's go back to this situation in June last year. President Joe Biden decided not to do it directly and postponed it. So why did they do it in September?

**SH:** The Secretary of State Anthony Blinken said a few days after the pipeline was blown up, at a news conference, that a major economic and almost military force was taken away from Putin. He said this was a tremendous opportunity, as Russia could no longer weaponize the pipelines – meaning that it was not able to force Western Europe not to support the U.S. in the war. The fear was that Western Europe would not go along any longer in the war. The biggest problem in Ukraine is corruption at the top. Probably one of the issues, though, of what I understand, is that Zelensky is taking too much of the money. He's taking too much of a cut, as they say in Hollywood gangster movies, you know, 'the swag'. He's taking his shares. But he shouldn't be taking as much. I'm just telling you what's in the community. What I'm telling you about is in the community, in my intel community.

I think that the reason they decided to do it then was that the war wasn't going well for the West and they were afraid of the winter coming. Nord Stream 2 has been sanctioned by Germany, it's been stopped by your country and not on an International level, and the U.S. were afraid that Germany would lift the sanctions because of a bad winter.

**FS:** According to you, what were the motives when you look behind the scenes? The U.S. government was opposed to the pipeline for many reasons. Some say they were opposed to it because they wanted to weaken Russia, to weaken the ties between Russia and Western Europe, Germany especially. But also maybe to weaken the German economy, which after all is a competitor to the U.S. economy. With the high gas prices, enterprises have started to move to the U.S. So what's your sense of the motives of the U.S. government, if they blew up the pipeline?

**SH:** I don't think they thought it through. I know this sounds strange. I don't think that Blinken and some others in the administration are deep thinkers. There certainly are people in the American economy who like the idea of us being more competitive. We're selling LNG liquefied [natural] gas at extremely big profits, we're making a lot of money on it. If China had not had the COVID problems, the price of gas would even be higher because China has now been able to sell some of its supplies to us. I'm sure there were some people thinking, boy, this is going to be a long-term boost for the American economy. But in that White House, I think the obsession was always re-election and they wanted to win the war, they wanted to get a victory, they wanted Ukraine somehow magically win.

There could be some people who think maybe it'll be better for our economy if the German economy was weak, but that's crazy thinking. I think basically that we bit deep into something that's not going to work. The war is not going to turn out well for this government.

**FS:** How do you think this war could end?

**SH:** It doesn't matter what I think. What I know is there's no way this war is going to turn out the way we want and I don't know what we're going to do as we go further down the line. It scares me if the President was willing to do this.

And the people who did this mission believed that the President did realise what he was doing to the people of Germany, that he was punishing them for a war that wasn't going well. And in the long run, this is going to be very detrimental not only to his reputation as the President, but politically too. It's going to be a stigma for America.

So what you have is a White House that thought they may have a losing card, and Germany and Western Europe may stop giving the arms we want and the German Chancellor could turn the pipeline on, that was always a fear. I would be asking a lot of questions to Chancellor Scholz. I would ask him what he learned in February when he was with the President. The operation was a big secret and the President wasn't supposed to tell anybody about this capability, but he does talk. He says things that he doesn't want to.

**FS:** Your story was reported in Western media with some restraint and criticism. Some attacked your reputation or said that you have only one anonymous source, and that's not reliable.

**SH:** How could I possibly talk about a source? I've written many stories based on unnamed sources. If I name somebody they'd be fired or worse, jailed. The law is so strict. I've never had anybody exposed, and of course when I write I say as I did in this article, it's a source, period. And over the years, the stories I've written have always been accepted.

And, you know, a personal attack on me doesn't get to the point. The point is that Biden chose to keep you cold this winter. The President of the United States would rather see Germany cold than Germany possibly not supportive in the Ukraine war and that to me is going to be a devastating thing for this White House. For me and I think also for the people on the mission it was appalling.

**FS:** The point is also that it can be perceived as an act of war not only against Russia but against Western allies, especially Germany.

**SH:** Let's keep it simple. I can tell you that the people involved in the operation saw the President as choosing to keep you cold for his short-range political goals, and that horrified them. I'm talking about American people that are intensely loyal to the United States. In the CIA it's understood that, as I put it in my article, they work for the Crown, they don't work for the Constitution. The one virtue of the CIA is that a President who can't do anything with Congress and nobody listens to him, he can take a walk in the backyard of the Rose Garden of the White House with the CIA director and somebody can get hurt 8,000 miles away. That's always been the selling point of the CIA, which I have problems with. But even in that

community it is appalled that he chose to keep Europe cold in support of a war that he's not going to win. And that to me is heinous.

**FS:** You said in your article that the planning of the attack was not reported to Congress, as it is necessary with other covert operations.

**SH:** It wasn't reported to many places inside the military. There were other people in other institutions that should have known but were not informed. The operation was very secret.

**FS:** I appreciate that you took your time. I think your work is very courageous.

**SH:** What's courageous about telling the truth? Our job isn't to be afraid. And sometimes it gets ugly. There have been times in my life, when, you know, I don't talk about it. Threats aren't made to people like me, they're made to children of people like me. There's been awful stuff. But you don't worry about it, you can't, you have to just do what you do.

**END**