

Hersh Berliner Interview

Mr. Scheidler: Mr. Hersh, please detail your findings. According to your source, what exactly happened, who was involved in the Nord Stream attack and what were the motives?

Mr. Hersh: It was a story that begged to be told. In late September 2022, eight bombs were to be detonated near the island of Bornholm in the Baltic Sea, six of which went off in an area that is fairly flat. They destroyed three of the four major Nord Stream 1 and 2 pipelines. The Nord Stream 1 pipeline has provided Germany and other parts of Europe with very cheap natural gas for many years. And then it was blown up, as was Nord Stream 2, and the question was who did it and why.

On February 7, 2022, just over two weeks before Russia invaded Ukraine, US President Joe Biden said at a White House press conference he held with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz that the US would stop Nord Stream.

Mr. Scheidler: His Deputy Secretary of State, Victoria Nuland, who was deeply implicated in the events of the Maidan revolution in 2014, had made a similar statement a few weeks earlier. They say the decision to shut down the pipeline was made even earlier by President Biden. You write in your report that in December 2021, National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan called a meeting of the newly formed task force of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the CIA, the State Department and the Treasury Department. They write, "Sullivan wanted the group to come up with a plan for the destruction of the two Nord Stream pipelines."

Mr. Hersh: That was three months before the war, before Christmas 2021. It was a high-level group that probably had a

different name, I just called it the Interagency Group, I don't know the official name if there was one. They were the CIA and the National Security Agency, which monitors and intercepts communications, the State Department, and the Treasury Department, which provides money. And probably a few other organizations that were involved. The Joint Chiefs of Staff were also represented. The point was to make recommendations on how to stop Russia, either with reversible measures such as further sanctions and economic pressure or with irreversible, "kinetic" measures, e.g. B. Blasts.

I don't want to go into the details here or talk about a specific meeting because I need to protect my source. I don't know how many people took part; do you know what I mean?

Mr. Scheidler: In your article, you wrote that in early 2022, the CIA working group reported to Sullivan's "Interagency Group" and said, quote, "We have a way of blowing up the pipelines."

Mr. Hersh: They had a way. There were people there who knew what we in America call "mine warfare." In the United States Navy there are units that deal with submarines, there is also a nuclear engineering command. And there is a mine squad. The area of underwater mines is very important and we have trained specialists in it. A central location for their education is a small vacation town called Panama City in the middle of nowhere in Florida. We train very good people there and employ them. Underwater miners are of great importance, for example to clear blocked entrances to harbors and blow up things that stand in the way. You can also blow up a specific country's underwater petroleum pipelines. It's not always good things they do, but they work absolutely in secret.

It was clear to the group in the White House that they could blow up the pipelines. There's an explosive called C4 that's incredibly powerful, especially at the level they use. You can control it remotely with underwater sonar devices. These sonars emit signals at low frequencies. So it was possible, and that was communicated to the White House in early January, because two or three weeks later, Undersecretary of State Victoria Nuland said we could do it. I think that was January 20th. And then the President, when he held the press conference together with the German Chancellor on February 7, 2022, also said that we could do it.

The German chancellor didn't say anything concrete at the time, he was very vague. One question I'd like to ask Scholz if I was chairing a parliamentary hearing is this: Has Joe Biden told you about this? Did he tell you then why he was so confident that he could destroy the pipeline? As Americans, we didn't have a plan in place then, but we knew we had the ability to do it.

Mr. Scheidler: You write that Norway played a role. To what extent was the country involved - and why should Norwegians do something like that?

Mr. Hersh: Norway is a great seafaring nation and they have deep sources of energy. They are also very keen to increase their natural gas supplies to Western Europe and Germany. And that's what they did, they increased their exports. So why not join forces with the US for economic reasons? In addition, there is marked hostility towards Russia in Norway.

Mr. Scheidler: In your article you write that the Norwegian secret service and the Navy were involved. They also say that Sweden

and Denmark were informed to some extent, but did not know everything.

Mr. Hersh: I was told: They did what they did and they knew what they were doing and they understood what was going on, but maybe no one ever said yes. I've done a lot of work on this subject with the people I've spoken to. Anyway, for this mission to go ahead, the Norwegians had to find the right place. The divers, who were trained in Panama City, could dive up to 100 meters deep without heavy equipment. The Norwegians found us a spot off the island of Bornholm in the Baltic Sea that was only 260 feet deep to operate there.

The divers had to return to the top slowly, there was a decompression chamber, and we used a Norwegian submarine hunter. Only two divers were used for the four pipelines. One problem was how to deal with the people monitoring the Baltic Sea.

The Baltic Sea is monitored very closely, there is a lot of data freely available, so we took care of it, there were three or four different people on it. And what was then done is very simple. For 21 years, our Sixth Fleet, which controls the Mediterranean Sea and also the Baltic Sea, has been conducting an exercise for the NATO navies in the Baltic Sea every summer (BALTOPS, editor's note). We're sending an aircraft carrier and other large ships to these exercises. And for the first time in history, the NATO operation in the Baltics had a new program. A 12-day mine dumping and mine detection exercise was to be conducted. A number of nations sent out mine teams, one group dropped a mine, and another mine group went in search and blew it up.

So there was a time when things blew up, and that was when the deep sea divers who put the mines on the pipelines were able to

operate. The two pipelines are about a mile apart, they're a little under the seabed silt, but they're not difficult to reach and the divers had practiced. It only took a few hours to place the bombs.

Mr. Scheidler: So that was in June 2022?

Mr. Hersh: Yes, they did towards the end of the exercise. But at the last minute, the White House got nervous. The President said he was afraid to do it. He changed his mind and issued new orders, giving the ability to remotely detonate the bombs at any time. You do that with a regular sonar, a Raytheon product by the way, you fly over the spot and drop a cylinder. It sends a low-frequency signal, you can describe it as a flute sound, you can set different frequencies.

However, the fear was that the bombs would not work if they stayed in the water for too long, which in fact should be the case with two bombs. So there was concern within the group to find the right remedy, and we actually had to reach out to other intelligence agencies, which I intentionally didn't write about.

Mr. Scheidler: And then what happened? The explosives were in place and a way was found to control them remotely.

Mr. Hersh: Joe Biden decided not to blow them up back in June, it was five months into the war. But in September he ordered it to be done. The operational staff, the people who do "kinetic" things for the United States, they do what the President says, and at first they thought that was a useful weapon that he could use in negotiations. But sometime after the Russians invaded, and then when the operation was complete, the whole thing became increasingly repugnant to the people running it. These are people who work in top positions in the secret services and are well trained. They opposed the project, they thought it was crazy.

Shortly after the attack, after they did as they were told, there was a lot of anger at the operation and rejection from those involved. That's one of the reasons I learned so much. And I'll tell you one more thing. The people of America and Europe who are building pipelines know what happened. I'm telling you something important. The people who own companies that build pipelines know the story. I didn't hear the story from them, but I quickly learned that they knew.

Mr. Scheidler: Let's return to this situation in June of last year. President Joe Biden decided not to do it directly and postponed it.

Mr. Hersh: Foreign Minister Antony Blinken said at a press conference a few days after the pipelines were blown up that an important factor in his power had been taken away from Putin. He said destroying the pipelines is a tremendous opportunity -- an opportunity to deprive Russia of the ability to use the pipelines as a weapon. The point was that Russia could no longer pressure Western Europe to end US support in the Ukraine war. The fear was that Western Europe would no longer participate.

I think the reason for this decision was that the war was not going well for the west and they were afraid of the approaching winter. Nord Stream 2 was put on hold by Germany itself, not international sanctions, and the US was afraid Germany would lift sanctions because of a cold winter.

Mr. Scheidler: What do you think were the motives for the attack?

Mr. Hersh: The US government was against the pipeline for many reasons. Some say she was against it because she wanted to weaken Russia or to weaken relations between Russia and Western Europe, particularly Germany. But maybe also to weaken the German economy, which is a competitor to the US economy.

High gas prices have prompted companies to relocate to the US. What is your take on the US government's motives?

I don't think they've thought this through thoroughly. I know that sounds strange. I don't think Secretary of State Blinken and some others in the government are deep thinkers. There are certainly people in American business who like the idea that we are becoming more competitive. We sell liquefied natural gas (LNG) at extremely high profits, we make a lot of money from it.

I'm sure there were some people who thought, Boy, is this going to give the American economy a long-term boost. But in the White House, I think they've always been obsessed with re-election, and they wanted to win the war, they wanted to win a victory, they wanted Ukraine to somehow magically win. There might be some people who think that maybe it's better for our economy if the German economy is weak, but that's crazy. I think we got caught up in something that won't work, the war won't end well for this government.

Mr. Scheidler: How do you think this war could end?

Mr. Hersh: It doesn't matter what I think. What I do know is that there is no way this war will end the way we want it to, and I don't know what we will do as we look further into the future. It scares me that the President was willing to do something like this. And the people running that mission believed that the President was aware of 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 will not only damage his reputation as President, it will also be very damaging politically. It will be a stigma for the US.

The White House was concerned that it might be lost, that Germany and Western Europe would stop supplying the weapons we wanted, and that the German Chancellor might put the pipeline back online—that was a big concern in Washington. I would ask Chancellor Scholz a lot of questions. I would ask him what he learned in February when he was with the President. The operation was top secret and the President wasn't supposed to tell anyone about our ability, but he likes to chat, he sometimes says things he shouldn't say.

Mr. Scheidler: Your story was reported in the German media in a rather cautious and critical manner. Some attacked your reputation or said you had only one anonymous source and that it was not reliable.

Mr. Hersh: How could I talk about my source? I have written many stories based on uncredited sources. If I named anyone they would be fired or worse, jailed. The law is very strict. I've never unmasked anyone, and of course when I write I say, as I've done in this article, that it's a source, period. Over the years, the stories I've written have always been accepted.

Mr. Scheidler: How did you check your facts?

Mr. Hersh: I worked with the same experienced fact-checkers I used to have at the New Yorker for the current story. Of course, there are many ways to verify obscure information shared with me. The personal attacks on me also miss the point. The point is that Biden has decided to let the Germans freeze this winter. The President of the United States would rather see Germany freeze than Germany possibly stop supporting Ukraine, and that, to me, is a devastating thing for this White House.

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

Mr. Hersh: I would put it more simply. The people involved in the operation saw that the President wanted to freeze Germany for his short-term political goals, and that horrified them. I'm talking about Americans who are very loyal to the United States. The CIA, as I put it in my article, works for power, not for the constitution.

The political advantage of the CIA is that a president who can't get his plans through Congress can walk the CIA director in the Rose Garden of the White House to plan something secret that's across the Atlantic -- or where anywhere in the world -- can meet many people. That was always the CIA's unique selling proposition -- which I have my problems with. But even that community is appalled that Biden has decided to expose Europe to the cold to support a war he will not win. This is nefarious to me.

Mr. Scheidler: You said in your article that the planning of the attack was not reported to Congress, as is necessary with other covert operations. The matter also went unreported to many within the military. There were people elsewhere who should have been informed but were not informed. The operation was very secret. What role does courage play for you in your job? What's brave about telling the truth? It's not our job to be afraid. And sometimes it gets ugly. There have been times in my life when... - you know, I don't talk about it. But threats are not directed at people like me, but at the children of people like me. There were terrible things. But you don't worry about it, you can't. You just have to do what you do.