

How America Took Out The Nord Stream Pipeline

The New York Times called it a “mystery,” but the United States executed a covert sea operation that was kept secret - until now

- by Seymour Hersh, Feb 8, 2023, [LINK](#)

The U.S. Navy’s Diving and Salvage Center can be found in a location as obscure as its name—down what was once a country lane in rural Panama City, a now-booming resort city in the southwestern panhandle of Florida, 70 miles south of the Alabama border. The center’s complex is as nondescript as its location—a drab concrete post-World War II structure that has the look of a vocational high school on the west side of Chicago. A coin-operated laundromat and a dance school are across what is now a four-lane road.

The center has been training highly skilled deep-water divers for decades who, once assigned to American military units worldwide, are capable of technical diving to do the good—using C4 explosives to clear harbors and beaches of debris and unexploded ordnance—as well as the bad, like blowing up foreign oil rigs, fouling intake valves for undersea power plants, destroying locks on crucial shipping canals. The Panama City center, which boasts the second largest indoor pool in America, was the perfect place to recruit the best, and most taciturn, graduates of the diving school who successfully did last summer what they had been authorized to do 260 feet under the surface of the Baltic Sea.

Last June, the Navy divers, operating under the cover of a widely publicized mid-summer NATO exercise known as BALTOPS 22, planted the remotely triggered explosives that, three months later, destroyed three of the four Nord Stream pipelines, according to a source with direct knowledge of the operational planning.

Two of the pipelines, which were known collectively as Nord Stream 1, had been providing Germany and much of Western Europe with cheap Russian natural gas for more than a decade. A second pair of pipelines, called Nord Stream 2, had been built but were not yet operational. Now, with Russian troops massing on the Ukrainian border and the bloodiest war in Europe since 1945 looming, President Joseph Biden saw the pipelines as a vehicle for Vladimir Putin to weaponize natural gas for his political and territorial ambitions.

Asked for comment, Adrienne Watson, a White House spokesperson, said in an email, “*This is false and complete fiction.*” Tammy Thorp, a spokesperson for the Central Intelligence Agency, similarly wrote: “*This claim is completely and utterly false.*”

Biden’s decision to sabotage the pipelines came after more than nine months of highly secret back and forth debate inside Washington’s national security community about how to best achieve that goal. For much of that time, the issue was not whether to do the mission, but how to get it done with no overt clue as to who was responsible.

There was a vital bureaucratic reason for relying

on the graduates of the center’s hardcore diving school in Panama City. The divers were Navy only, and not members of America’s Special Operations Command, whose covert operations must be reported to Congress and briefed in advance to the Senate and House leadership—the so-called Gang of Eight. The Biden Administration was doing everything possible to avoid leaks as the planning took place late in 2021 and into the first months of 2022.

President Biden and his foreign policy team—National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan, Secretary of

as 45 percent of Russia’s annual budget.

America’s political fears were real: Putin would now have an additional and much-needed major source of income, and Germany and the rest of Western Europe would become addicted to low-cost natural gas supplied by Russia—while diminishing European reliance on America. In fact, that’s exactly what happened. Many Germans saw Nord Stream 1 as part of the deliverance of former Chancellor Willy Brandt’s famed Ostpolitik theory, which would enable postwar Germany to rehabilitate itself and other European nations destroyed in World War II by, among other initiatives, utilizing cheap Russian gas to fuel a prosperous Western European market and trading economy.

Nord Stream 1 was dangerous enough, in the view of NATO and Washington, but Nord Stream 2, whose construction was completed in September of 2021, would, if approved by German regulators, double the amount of cheap gas that would be available to Germany and Western Europe. The second pipeline also would provide enough gas for more than 50 percent of Germany’s annual consumption. Tensions were constantly escalating between Russia

and NATO, backed by the aggressive foreign policy of the Biden Administration.

Opposition to Nord Stream 2 flared on the eve of the Biden inauguration in January 2021, when Senate Republicans, led by Ted Cruz of Texas, repeatedly raised the political threat of cheap Russian natural gas during the confirmation hearing of Blinken as Secretary of State. By then a unified Senate had successfully passed a law that, as Cruz told Blinken, “*halted [the pipeline] in its tracks.*” There would be enormous political and economic pressure from the German government, then headed by Angela Merkel, to get the second pipeline online.

Would Biden stand up to the Germans? Blinken said yes, but added that he had not discussed the specifics of the incoming President’s views. “*I know his strong conviction that this is a bad idea, the Nord Stream 2,*” he said. “*I know that he would have us use every persuasive tool that we have to convince our friends and partners, including Germany, not to move forward with it.*”

A few months later, as the construction of the second pipeline neared completion, Biden blinked. That May, in a stunning turnaround, the administration waived sanctions against Nord Stream AG, with a State Department official conceding that trying to stop the pipeline through sanctions and diplomacy had “*always been a long shot.*” Behind the scenes, administration officials reportedly urged Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, by then facing a threat of Russian invasion, not to criticize the move.

There were immediate consequences. Senate Republicans, led by Cruz, announced an immediate



State Tony Blinken, and Victoria Nuland, the Undersecretary of State for Policy—had been vocal and consistent in their hostility to the two pipelines, which ran side by side for 750 miles under the Baltic Sea from two different ports in northeastern Russia near the Estonian border, passing close to the Danish island of Bornholm before ending in northern Germany.

The direct route, which bypassed any need to transit Ukraine, had been a boon for the German economy, which enjoyed an abundance of cheap Russian natural gas—enough to run its factories and heat its homes while enabling German distributors to sell excess gas, at a profit, throughout Western Europe. Action that could be traced to the administration would violate US promises to minimize direct conflict with Russia. Secrecy was essential.

From its earliest days, Nord Stream 1 was seen by Washington and its anti-Russian NATO partners as a threat to western dominance. The holding company behind it, Nord Stream AG, was incorporated in Switzerland in 2005 in partnership with Gazprom, a publicly traded Russian company producing enormous profits for shareholders which is dominated by oligarchs known to be in the thrall of Putin. Gazprom controlled 51 percent of the company, with four European energy firms—one in France, one in the Netherlands and two in Germany—sharing the remaining 49 percent of stock, and having the right to control downstream sales of the inexpensive natural gas to local distributors in Germany and Western Europe. Gazprom’s profits were shared with the Russian government, and state gas and oil revenues were estimated in some years to amount to as much