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Who Attacked Nord Stream 2?

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The US and its European allies apparently no longer need to prove Russia's guilt for anything. After the attack on the Nord Stream 2 natural gas pipeline, they blamed Moscow, their charges avidly pushed by Western journalists who feast on official press releases and backroom leaks.

Washington and European governments even cited Moscow's *denial* as evidence of its guilt. It was as if Russian President Vladimir Putin had admitted his responsibility, but no matter. Moscow obviously damaged its own transmission line because ... it obviously had done so.

Anything is possible in love and war, and Putin has made some very bad decisions, starting with the invasion of Ukraine. However, Moscow bombing its own pipeline is, well, counterintuitive.

One claim is that Russia decided to prevent its own natural gas exports to push up prices for Europe. However, it would be bizarrely counterproductive to disable its own distribution system. Moscow had already turned off the gas for various reasons. Why would it make it hard to turn the flow back on?

Another possible objective would be to demonstrate that Europe's energy infrastructure is vulnerable. Then the Europeans might abandon Ukraine and drop sanctions, lest something similar happens to their operations. However, hampering its own energy production seems a bit too clever by half even for Putin.

Russia might hope that damaging Nord Stream 2 would scare Europe. However, the message is indirect at best. Moreover, if Russian agents could easily fan across the continent causing energy chaos, why haven't they? Why didn't Moscow demonstrate its ability to make European peoples even colder by hitting *their* facilities rather than Russia's?

Putin might be wary of staging attacks for which it might be blamed since everyone would suspect Moscow if European-owned infrastructure was damaged. But Russia is now being blamed for an attack on its own operation, so guilt is presumed in any case. So much for deniability.

Moreover, the US and some European governments—most obviously Ukraine and its strongest supporters, the United Kingdom, Poland, and Baltics—are the chief beneficiaries of a damaged pipeline. They and others vociferously opposed Nord Stream 2, believing that they had been anointed by heaven, or elsewhere from above, to tell Berlin how to run its affairs.

With Germany still refusing to go cold turkey and destroy its economy, they might be prepared to shut down its imports by any means, fair or foul.

Ukraine's involvement would surprise no one, though Kyiv might have trouble organizing such an operation. At the very least, the Zelensky government likely would require assistance from another country. Desire likely outstrips ability for Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. They also would be vulnerable politically within NATO and the European Union if they were found out, attacking their neighbor's energy sources.

Poland also would like to sever Germany's energy connection with Russia, no matter how difficult the consequences would be for the German people. Warsaw presumably could undertake such an operation but would want to move carefully against Germany. Their relations are complicated, to say the least. To be found out as the saboteur would be more than a little embarrassing. Indeed, it would potentially be suicidal politically, given the broad hostility toward Warsaw's conservative nationalist government within the European Union.

The United Kingdom is a far more likely culprit. Former Prime Minister Boris Johnson went all in for Ukraine, apparently to invest his premiership with some of the glow that surrounds Winston Churchill, about whom Johnson wrote a biography. Johnson visited Ukraine and played the visiting hero, winning some good press to counteract his problems at home.

Targeting German energy facilities would be escalation of British involvement in the conflict, but London could easily believe the end justifies the means. Lock in the rest of Europe alongside the UK and behind Ukraine. Especially since Nord Stream 2 critics see the ongoing crisis as vindication. And the pipeline is especially vulnerable now, with Berlin theoretically committed to moving away from Russian natural gas.

An equally likely culprit is the US. There is no proof that Washington is to blame. However, Russia is being charged without evidence, so it makes sense to consider other suspects. And Washington tops the list.

Naturally, members of the Blob, as the American foreign policy establishment has been called, dismiss any suggestion that Washington could have had a role. Virginal Uncle Sam—run by the angels of which Federalist 51 spoke, dedicated to the betterment of humankind, and unconstrained by original sin—would never stoop so low as to damage Germany's natural gas pipeline. They would resign from office before considering such an outrageous step. Who else on earth is as kind, virtuous, and far-seeing as American presidents, secretaries of state, and national security advisers?

The only proper response to this perspective, of course, is hysterical laughter.

For years the US objective toward Nord Stream 2 was simple: to destroy it. US opinions were many and hostile. Legislative sponsors of US sanctions threatened companies involved in the project with "crushing and potentially fatal legal and economic sanctions." That was before hostilities with Russia. Now, with the Biden administration committed to a brutal proxy war against Moscow, Washington wants to deter any defections from the allied cause. Given its dependence on Russia and burden of higher energy prices, Berlin is perhaps Europe's weakest link, or at least the continent's most significant weak link. How to keep Germany in line? Shut down its natural gas supplies.

Surely Washington's involvement would surprise no one. Its endless pronouncements about democracy and human rights might dazzle some observers, but the US always has been

extraordinarily cold-blooded when it comes to foreign policy. Washington has bombed, invaded, and occupied other nations. Abandoned allies. Supported dictators. Staged coup d'états. Assassinated officials. Imposed sanctions. Droned civilians. Backed foreign aggression. Starved children. And failed to hold anyone accountable for killing even hundreds of thousands of people.

As for involvement in the Russo-Ukraine war, US officials have gloried their apparent role in killing Russian generals, sinking a Russian ship, and otherwise destroying Russian equipment and killing Russian personnel. Damaging a pipeline that enriches Moscow, while incidentally benefiting Germany, would be a modest step in comparison.

Believe the Biden administration could not be so tough and unscrupulous as to undermine an ally? Remember when the US spied on German Chancellor Angela Merkel and other top German officials? Respecting allies is so ... yesterday.

Indeed, anyone who doubts the ruthlessness of American policy need only review the last two decades. Almost 3,000 people were brutally murdered on 9/11—an outrage, to be sure, but a tiny toll in what became the Global War on Terror. The US ended up starting, expanding, or joining wars in which nearly a million, and probably more, people died. Many were innocent civilians.

Washington often took the lead, doing much of the killing and destroying. The US even allied with very undemocratic Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates in their aggressive war against Yemen. Some 400,000 people have died there, and the toll could go much higher, with most deaths a result of Saudi and Emirati military action. And then there are sanctions, today callously used to starve Syrians in order to turn their nation into a “quagmire” for Russia, according to former ambassador James Jeffrey. Nor is this a new policy. One of the most chilling comments ever from a US official came from then UN Ambassador Madeleine Albright who, when asked about the deaths of 500,000 Iraqi children as a result of US sanctions, stated: “We think the price is worth it.”

Can anyone doubt that American officials would not hesitate to decide that the price to Germany of a busted natural gas pipeline would be “worth it” to America?

Who sabotaged Nord Stream 2? Maybe it was Russia, though that doesn't make much sense. There are better candidates, as we can consider above.

Moscow's attack on Ukraine was criminal and unjustified. Damage to an energy pipeline is a small matter compared to the extraordinary toll of death and destruction in the war. However, the attack on Nord Stream 2 is yet another expansion of an already dangerous conflict. The allies are risking war with a nuclear power over stakes that are almost frivolous in comparison. All sides need to back away before the dogs of war fully slip their leash.

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