



Who Sabotaged the Nord Stream Pipelines?

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Speculation abounds about who or what could have damaged the Nord Stream pipelines in the Baltic Sea, a whodunit case that is raising fears about widening the war in Ukraine. The two pipelines—which carry natural gas from their source in Russia to their destinations in Germany—sprung leaks in four separate locations in Swedish- and Danish-controlled international waters earlier this week.

Seismologists say they detected explosions near the pipelines at the time. That and the fact that the leaks happened simultaneously on two separate pipelines that were built at different times has led many to conclude that the damage was likely sabotage.

On Thursday, the North Atlantic Council—the governing body of the 28-member National Atlantic Treaty Association (NATO)—released a statement declaring that the leaks were almost certainly the "result of deliberate, reckless, and irresponsible acts of sabotage."

"Any deliberate attack against Allies' critical infrastructure would be met with a united and determined response," the military alliance said.

The council didn't provide any new information proving sabotage. It also didn't identify who the alliance thought was behind the alleged attacks on the pipeline.

So...who did it?

Emma Ashford, a senior fellow at the Stimson Center (and former Cato Institute scholar), has posted an interesting Twitter thread parsing different possibilities that people have been tossing

around, which include sabotage by Russians, Americans, Ukrainians, other Eastern Europeans, or even the Chinese.

Her best guess is that this was done by Moscow, possibly as a way of hurting the West in a war that's going badly, or perhaps even to avoid lawsuits when Russia's state-owned Gazprom fails to fulfill contracts for gas delivery. Russia had already stopped gas exports to Europe through the Nord Stream pipeline in August. Nord Stream 2 hasn't opened for business yet.

The Russian government, for its part, has denied responsibility for the attack. Per *The Wall Street Journal*, a Russian government spokesperson seemed to suggest that NATO would have had a far easier time sabotaging the pipelines.

That idea has found a supporter in Fox News host Tucker Carlson. On Tuesday, Carlson speculated that the U.S. was behind the attack, pointing to pre-war comments from President Joe Biden that if Russia invaded Ukraine, "there will be no longer a Nord Stream 2. We will bring an end to it."

Fueling some of the speculation that the U.S. was behind the alleged attack was a tweet from Radek Sikorski, a Polish member of the European Parliament, that seemed to thank the U.S. for damaging the pipeline. Sikorski's follow-up comments, however, seem to put the blame back on Russia.

Whoever is responsible, the immediate economic impacts of the pipelines being out of commission are basically zero, given that neither was carrying gas to Europe when they were damaged.

Europe is nevertheless expected to see a recession comparable to the 2009 financial crisis because of a shortage of Russian gas exports generally. *Bloomberg* is predicting that European GDP could fall as much as 5 percent over the winter. Inflation is at 10 percent in the Eurozone. European governments are expanding aid to help people cope with gas prices. There's even some talk of price caps.

FREE MINDS

The government can't just fly a drone over your property to look for weed. So concluded a Colorado judge, who ruled that the police's warrantless use of a drone to survey an illegal grow operation amounted to illegal trespass.

FREE MARKETS

Some people are accusing Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis of fair-weather fiscal responsibility for requesting federal hurricane aid after having voting against similar aid in the past. On Wednesday, the Republican governor asked President Joe Biden to declare a major disaster in response to the damage caused by Hurricane Ian, and release federal disaster relief funds.

The New York Times dutifully published a story highlighting the alleged discrepancy between that request and DeSantis' vote against a Hurricane Sandy relief package in 2013, when he was a Florida congressman.

"Nearly a decade later, as his state confronts the devastation and costly destruction wrought by Hurricane Ian, Mr. DeSantis is appealing to the nation's better angels—and betting on its short

memory," writes the *Times*. Such accusations have also come from a number of New York Democrats, evidently still bitter about his opposition to Hurricane Sandy aid.

These attacks are a little off-base, as accusations of Republican disaster relief hypocrisy often are.

The Hurricane Sandy aid package that DeSantis voted against was a supplemental disaster appropriation that Congress hadn't budgeted for and would be debt-funded. He didn't object to the aid per se, arguing instead that it should come with spending offsets.

The money DeSantis is asking Biden to release, meanwhile, is disaster relief funding that's already been appropriated and budgeted for. It's there to be spent.

Don't give DeSantis *too* much credit, though. He did vote for a gigantic \$36 billion supplemental aid package in 2017 after hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria. That's a much more direct example of hypocrisy.