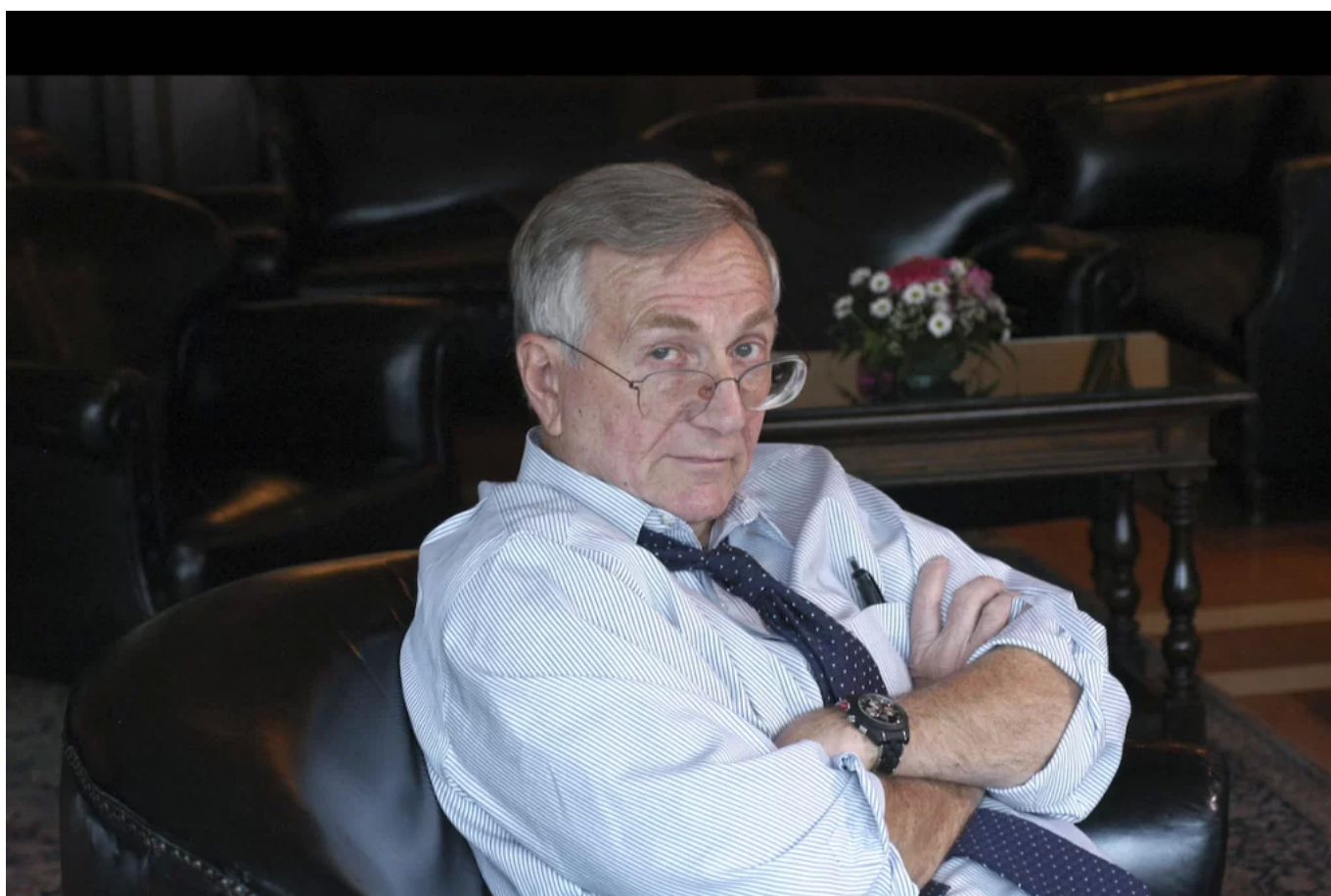


# Sy Hersh Swings and Misses Big

Careless claims that the U.S. blew up the Nord Stream pipelines cover for the real scandals of the Biden administration



by Lee Smith

The most astounding claim in [the blockbuster new article](#) from Seymour Hersh alleging that the U.S. is responsible for sabotaging two of Russia's natural gas pipelines is that the Biden administration is led by a no-nonsense crew of highly capable tacticians. Forget what you've heard about secret classified documents turning up in various Biden residences; in Hersh's telling the Biden White House practices exceptional

operational security.

And it would need to, because according to the single anonymous source on whom Hersh bases his piece, the Russians have “superlative surveillance of the Baltic Sea.” Pulling off a plan to blow up Nord Stream 1 and Nord Stream 2 pipelines between Germany and Russia would require not only vision and leadership, but sophisticated cover. So what kind of highly advanced stealth technology did the Biden team employ to cloak the underwater operation? In fact, they did just the opposite. They hid the plot to start World War III in plain sight.

According to the source, who had “direct knowledge of the operational planning,” writes Hersh, a team of U.S. Navy divers planted the explosives in June 2022 during an annual NATO exercise in the Baltic Sea while tens of thousands of naval personnel from allied countries on site and hundreds of thousands more were monitoring the exercise remotely. That is, according to Hersh’s source, Team Biden thwarted the Russians’ “superb surveillance” by planting explosives before the eyes of an audience of military and intelligence officials from European countries that depend on the Russian gas carried through the pipelines.

It was a brilliant plan, to be sure, but according to Hersh’s source, Biden was still worried: If the pipelines blew up just 48 hours after NATO had conducted an enormous joint exercise in exactly the same place, the Russians might get suspicious. So the President asked for a mechanism that would allow him to detonate the explosives at a later date. According to Hersh’s source, it was something of a chore for a military with limitless resources to devise a way to blow something up later from somewhere else. But it was precisely that innovation that would keep Putin from suspecting U.S. involvement when the pipelines blew up four months after NATO had conducted a massive exercise in exactly the same place where the pipelines were sabotaged.

The White House has called Hersh's story an "utterly false and complete fiction" while a Russian spokesperson said in response to the piece that Moscow has "repeatedly expressed" its conviction that the U.S. and NATO were responsible. Maybe the U.S. really did sabotage Russian pipelines, but it sure didn't happen the way Hersh describes it. Maybe it was the Russians who did it to themselves, or perhaps it was those with seemingly the strongest motive for hitting Vladimir Putin, the Ukrainians. There is not enough evidence yet to know. But we do know enough about Biden's public record to judge the story's premise, never mind its absurd details, as questionable.

As Vice President, Biden warned against killing Osama bin Laden, even with an elite Navy SEAL team tasked for the mission. But as president he ordered Navy regulars to blow up the piggy bank of a state with a large nuclear arsenal? Biden let a Chinese spy balloon tour the American homeland, crossing over several sensitive sites, but he sucker-punched Putin in Russia's backyard? Hard as it may be to believe, the big takeaway from the piece is just that: Joe Biden is one tough hombre. To conclude, Hersh writes:

*The source had a much more streetwise view of Biden's decision to sabotage more than 1500 miles of Gazprom pipeline as winter approached. "Well," he said, speaking of the President, "I gotta admit the guy has a pair of balls. He said he was going to do it, and he did."*

Hersh's source wanted readers to believe that despite seeming like a pensioner in steep cognitive decline, Biden is such a hard-charging defender of democracy that he bested even Putin in the black arts. Americans, thank your lucky stars that your security is in the rough-hewn hands of Dark Brandon.

One former senior intelligence official I spoke with described the Hersh piece as "Steele Dossier-quality garbage."

Journalists say the Hersh story was rejected by several publications before he decided to publish it on his own Substack. The issue was apparently that the story was single-sourced, but the real problem seems to be something else.

Hersh has enjoyed an impressive journalistic career that includes a Pulitzer Prize for his 1968 reporting on the My Lai massacre, when U.S. soldiers slaughtered Vietnamese civilians. He is also notorious for getting spun up by his sources. Most notably, he fell for [forged documents](#) claiming that John Kennedy bought Marilyn Monroe's silence about their alleged affair. Hersh was planning to use them for his book [The Dark Side of Camelot](#) but luckily for him questions about the documents' authenticity surfaced before publication and he had time to withdraw the sections based on them.

His most charitable colleagues like to distinguish between the hard-working veteran reporter and the man who seems incapable of stopping himself from making sensational claims unsupported by evidence. For instance, shortly after *The New Yorker* published his deeply reported expose about U.S. military personnel torturing detainees at Abu Ghraib, Hersh mesmerized an ACLU audience saying he'd only told half the story – [the Pentagon had videotapes](#) of American soldiers sodomizing young boys at the prison. He never followed up with a written report to corroborate those charges. And so according to this interpretation of his two modes, Hersh unplugged is a freewheeling and sometimes parodic version of the indefatigable investigative journalist who's at his best when accompanied by a rigorous editorial process.

But that's not entirely accurate. Some of Hersh's most bizarre reports were published in *The New Yorker*, a publication once recognized as America's most prestigious magazine. In a 2008 article, for instance, Hersh questioned whether the Israelis really bombed a Syrian nuclear facility the year before, a fact corroborated by virtually everyone in the world aside from the Syrian government. The Israelis bombed something,

concluded Hersh, but probably not a nuclear facility, at least not according to his sources.

The Lebanese press portrayed him as an asset of Syrian intelligence and even identified who in Damascus controlled him, facts that apparently went unnoticed by *The New Yorker's* famed fact-checking department. In [a 2007 New Yorker](#) article, Hersh reported that Vice President Dick Cheney and Saudi Ambassador Bandar bin Sultan backed Al Qaeda-linked extremist groups to wage terror operations. One of Hersh's sources was a former Lebanese minister named [Michel Samaha](#), a pro-Syrian operative who a few years after the story was published was [arrested](#) in Lebanon for arranging Al Qaeda-linked terror operations on behalf of Syrian intelligence services. Damascus, it seems, had used Hersh to give cover to its own murderous campaign.

It appears that editors will support Hersh's work when it serves the interests of the party they support, the Democrats, whether those stories are true or not. His establishment media enablers stayed away from the Biden pipeline piece because it aligned with the belief of many on the right, [including senior GOP officials](#), that Biden blew up the pipelines.

In this version, the national security establishment manipulated a nearly comatose Biden into the war with Russia that it has long craved. There's no doubt that Washington is a pro-Ukraine town on both sides of the aisle, and populated by unreconstructed cold warriors, many of whom have recklessly pushed to expand NATO to Russia's borders. And there is a long trail of Ukrainian-related corruption leading from the boardroom of the Ukrainian energy company that paid Hunter Biden \$80,000 a month to his father's office. But Biden doesn't see Russia as an existential foe. More importantly, neither does the Democrat's party boss, Barack Obama.

The Vladimir Putin that Democrats despise is a hate-object of their own making, the mythical scourge of democracy who stole

the 2016 election from Hillary Clinton and gave it to “Kremlin stooge” Donald Trump. But the real-world Putin is a man the Democrats have done business with. When Biden was Vice President, the White House teamed up with Putin to kill terrorists in Syria, where the Russians targeted Sunni regions and bombed schools and hospitals as Obama officials protested impotently at the U.N.

Indeed, if anyone sold America out to Moscow, it was Obama – he all but invited the Russians into the eastern Mediterranean, a vital zone of U.S. influence, where they built a stronghold for the first time in nearly half a century. Putin was there to protect Iranian forces, which was good for Obama – if the Iranians lost in Syria, what was the point of legalizing Tehran’s nuclear weapons program? Without Putin, Obama’s signature foreign policy initiative, the Iran deal, would have come to naught. And with Biden in charge, the administration used the Russians as mediators with Iran through 2021 to try to restore the nuclear deal that Trump dismantled. If the deal does come back, Russia stands to pocket billions of dollars as Iran’s nuclear sponsor.

That many on the right are convinced Biden wanted war with Russia suggests that the ruling party’s efforts to pollute the U.S. information ecosystem through serial propaganda operations is not just turning their base into mindless zombies but is also affecting the opposition. When everything the media prints is fake news to serve an oligarchic regime, and a censorship consortium consisting of the press, Big Tech, and U.S. spy services calls facts “disinformation,” it’s hard to keep things straight in a labyrinth of lies.

But for Trump supporters, ignoring the facts behind the Nord Stream story has the peculiar effect of obscuring Trump’s achievements. In addition to his many unique qualities, some good and some less good, he was a president who also executed normal commander-in-chief functions exceptionally well. The America First movement rightly celebrates that Trump didn’t

start any new wars, but the purpose of foreign policy is not simply to avoid conflict but rather to protect and advance the national interest on behalf of the American public. The United States has dangerous adversaries, like Putin, and the president's job is to keep them in check. Good presidents do that by establishing the conditions that prevent war, and that's why Trump, with the support of Sen Ted Cruz, sanctioned Nord Stream 2.

Hersh's framework is wrong. To advance the theory that Biden sabotaged the pipelines, he cites as evidence a press conference in which the president boasted that he'd terminate Nord Stream 2. Hersh's source claims Biden had said "that we knew how to do it" – i.e., destroy the pipeline.

But Biden didn't say that. Hersh was too lazy to do his own fact-checking, even though he links to a video of the press conference. Biden said that if the Russians invade, "we will bring an end to it." After a reporter asked how that was possible since NS2 is a German project, Biden said "I promise you we will be able to do it." Hersh didn't bother with the details because he needs Biden's February press conference to show that the administration all but confessed, before the act, to committing an act of war against Russia.

Hersh is also wrong that Biden and his foreign policy team were "vocal and consistent in their hostility to the two pipelines." Here are the facts: the White House and State Department, especially the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, Victoria Nuland, [disagreed](#) over Nord Stream 2. The White House wanted to undo sanctions just as they were determined to cancel every other part of Trump's legacy. Further, Biden and senior White House deputies saw lifting sanctions as a favor to Angela Merkel, the leader of the anti-Trump resistance in Europe.

The pipeline crosses the same territory as NS1 and the European terminal for both is a port city in the district that

Merkel represented in the German parliament. NS2 would bring in another 55 billion cubic metres (BCM) of natural gas per annum on top of the 55 billion BCM already coming in via NS1. For Moscow, before the war anyway, NS2 meant locking in the Europeans' addiction to their cheap gas so competing infrastructure could atrophy. And Berlin saw NS2 as an opportunity to give all German industry an enormous advantage over competitors with gas prices even lower than what the rest of Europe paid.

For the Germans, the prospect of extending their industrial domination for another generation was so heady that when Trump warned at the 2018 U.N. general assembly that Germany would soon become entirely dependent on Russian energy unless it changed course, German diplomats [laughed haughtily](#). Trump was referring to Nord Stream 2. But because NS2 promised to shower wealth and prestige on Merkel's patrons and clients, the Biden White House lifted sanctions and gilded the outgoing chancellor's career.

Nuland is a genuine Russia hawk, which is why publicizing her role in Russiagate helped the Clinton campaign and Obama administration sell the hoax. She was opposed to lifting NS2 sanctions because, among other reasons, she really hates Putin. But when she said, "If Russia invades Ukraine, one way or another [Nord Stream 2 will not move forward](#)," she was not intimating that the U.S. would sabotage the pipelines in the future. How could she? She'd lost an argument with a President who wouldn't even keep sanctions on NS2 no matter how much lifting them might destabilize Europe.

When Biden said we will bring an end to NS2, he was defending his decision to lift sanctions in front of a press corps that was briefed on the internal policy argument. Even Democrats like Senator Bob Menendez (D-NJ) were critical of Biden's move. Outside of a few reporters from conservative outfits, the press treats him like a kindly grandfather in his dotage. He's not used to real questions. So when asked to answer one,



he snapped back in characteristic fashion, with tough talk –“I promise you we will be able to do it.” It seems that all he meant was that the U.S. would reimpose sanctions. But as even Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky had told the White House, sanctions would be worthless after a Russian invasion. By lifting sanctions on NS2, Biden had forfeited the only deterrence he had to keep the Russians from crossing the border, and even the pro-Biden press knew it. So Biden resorted to empty threats–*Just let Putin try it.*

According to Hersh’s source, the decision to blow up the pipelines originated months before, when Biden’s National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan “asked for recommendations about how to respond to Putin’s impending invasion.” But it seems the only thing the White House had ever planned was a communications strategy to explain how the rout of Ukraine had nothing to do with Biden’s decision to lift sanctions. The administration assumed the shooting would be over in days, probably with Zelensky swinging from a lamppost in Kyiv. That’s why Biden offered him asylum 72 hours after the invasion. But the Ukrainians fought back, and Biden has been filling Ukraine’s coffers with U.S. taxpayer dollars ever since, presumably in part to keep Zelensky from mouthing off about the American president’s culpability in starting a war that may break Europe.

Trump is right when he says that Putin wouldn’t have invaded Ukraine were he still in the White House, so long as he kept NS2 sanctions in place. Naturally, it would have enraged the Germans, and the U.S. media would’ve blamed Trump for alienating our great ally in Berlin, even if the Germans were plotting with Putin to impoverish the rest of Europe. But all that’s hypothetical. What we know for sure is that Trump was on the mark when he warned the Germans that Nord Stream2 would come back to haunt them. And, thanks to Biden, it has hurt America, too.

There is indeed a scandal that involves Biden and Russian

pipelines, but it's not the one Seymour Hersh wrote about. It's simply this: a venal and careless old man was so obsessed with undoing his predecessor's work that he greenlighted a war in Europe with consequences that are likely to impact how Americans live for years to come.

First published in [Tablet](#).