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A section of steel pipe for Nord Stream 2 with concrete coating. (Photo: Wikipedia)

After Sy Hersh's Article: Norway, a Poseidon and PM Støre

Until at least the 8th of March 2023, there was a general consensus that the attack on the Nord Stream pipelines 1 and 2 on the 26th of September 2022 was an act of "state terrorism".

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According to both the Danish and Swedish authorities investigating the case, the destruction was enormous. The explosion at a depth of about 80 meters was registered as an earthquake measuring 2.3 on the Richter scale [1]. It was registered as far north as the northern tip of Sweden, 1600 km from the site. The pipelines had been built in sections 12 meters long with a diameter of 116 cm [2], an inner pipe of 4 cm thick steel covered by concrete 6-11 cm thick [3]. Each 12-meter section had a total weight of 24 tons. The explosion had blown away 50 meters or about 100 tons of the pipeline [4]. This operation required deep-sea divers with specialized equipment and a ship with a decompression chamber. It required specially trained divers that were able to take several hundred kilos of explosives down to the seabed and professionally attach them to

the pipes. According to the two Scandinavian countries, the attack was definitely carried out by a state agency, since it would have been impossible for private individuals to accomplish it.

This was perhaps the most monumental attack on physical infrastructure during peacetime. Tens of billions of dollars worth of infrastructure were demolished. More importantly, however, a vital physical link between Russia and Germany was cut off, thereby destroying the prospect of a Russo-European "union of gas and industry". The Russo-European cooperation was as significant as the Coal and Steel Community had been during the 1950s, which was based on mutual interests shared by former enemies (France and Germany) and then developed into the European Union with the explicit goal of avoiding a future war in Europe. Simi-

larly, the Russo-German integration was much more than an industrial enterprise, it was also a peace project meant to prevent a future war between the old Cold War antagonists. Accordingly, the Nord Stream attack was not only an act of war against Russia (Gazprom), the owner of 51% of the pipeline and German companies (and individual European companies) that own the remaining 49% [5], but also an attack on the vital relationships that had opened up the possibility of a new phase of European integration. It was an act of war against the European policies of reassurance and détente that, from about 1990, had made the end of the Cold War possible.

On the 11th of October 2022, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg declared that any attack on infrastructure critical to the NATO military alliance would trigger a “united and determined response” [6]. He indicated that an attack on infrastructure such as gas pipelines could trigger NATO's article 5 and would be considered an act of war [7]. The attack on the Nord Stream pipelines should accordingly be considered an act of war against both Germany and Russia. Apparently, Jens Stoltenberg was worried that Russia might retaliate and attack Norwegian and other pipelines. Russia pointed

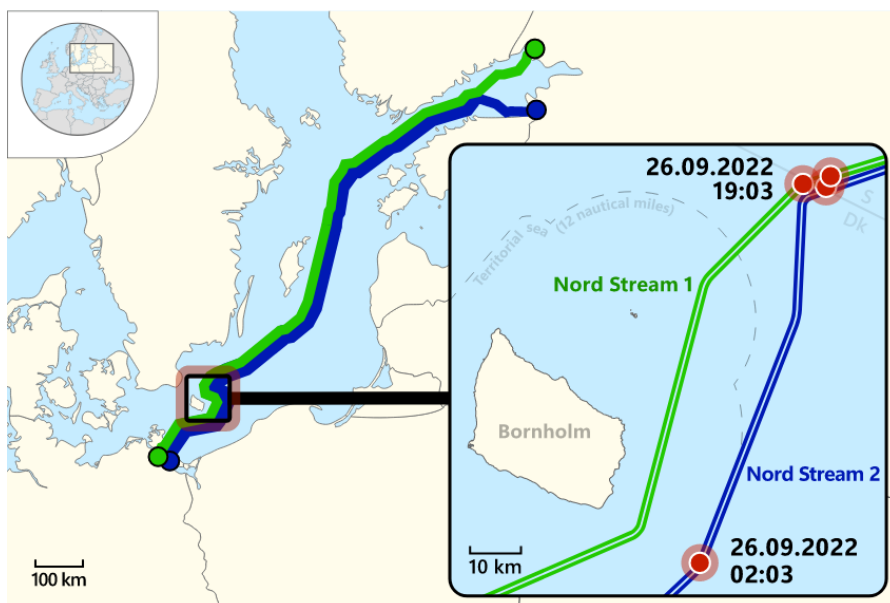
to the possibility of Anglo-American responsibility for the attacks of 26th September. However, no nation came forward to take responsibility for the attacks and no nation was willing to expose their findings on the identity of the perpetrators of this act of terror.

American rhetoric and Seymour Hersh's article

We all know that in January and February 2022, both the US Under Secretary Victoria Nuland and President Biden had promised to eliminate the pipeline if Russia entered Ukraine [8]. However, as early as 2021, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee had already declared that they wanted to end the pipeline “permanently” [9]. As President Trump's National Security Advisor John Bolton said [10]: “We should cut it off. We should have cut it off in the Trump Administration. ... Trump considered it, but did nothing”. And in 2014, former US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said that the Europeans would have to replace their dependency on Russian gas with American gas [11], which implied the elimination of the Nord Stream pipelines. The US neoconservatives wanted

Europe to depend on the US and not on Russia for gas. Even more important, this US security elite wanted Europe to define Russia as its enemy, because this would force Europe to rely fully on the United States. The US decision to destroy the Russian pipelines was probably made many years ago, the problem was finding a way to justify it. Neither the 1982 CIA attack on the Russian Yamal Pipeline [12] nor the danger of nuclear war in 1983 had been enough to persuade the Germans and the Russians to rethink their pipeline project. To cut off Russia from Europe almost certainly pre-supposed a European-Russian war to justify the attack. The United States would have to provoke Russia into a war before they could take out the pipelines. After they had been destroyed, Secretary of State Blinken and Under Secretary Nuland were both enthusiastic, Blinken saying it gave the US a “tremendous opportunity” [13], while Nuland said, “... we are very gratified to know that Nord Stream 2 is now, as you like to say, a hunk of metal at the bottom of the sea” [14].

On the 8th of February 2023, after months of investigation, Seymour Hersh published an article detailing the both the planning and the execution of the attack [15]. He wrote that in December 2021, months before the Russian invasion, President Biden had appointed National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan to chair an inter-agency group with participants “from the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the CIA, and the State and Treasury Departments” to solve the problem of the pipelines. They had a series of meetings on the “top floor of the Old Executive Office Building”. In early 2022, the CIA came up with a credible plan “to blow up the pipelines” with the use of special Navy deep-sea divers from the diving centre in Panama City Florida, which “just happens to be the location of the CIA Maritime branch in the Directorate of Operations”, to quote former CIA officer Larry Johnson [16]. Everyone understood that this was serious: If it was traceable to the US, “it's an act of war,” as Hersh's source told him. In order to deal with local aspects of the plan in Europe, the group turned to Norway.



Map of Nord Stream 1 with two pipelines (green) and Nord Stream 2 with two pipelines (blue). The sites of the explosions are marked in red. (Image: Wikipedia)

According to Sy Hersh, a “very competent American team went to Norway ... sometime in March 2022, ... to meet with the Norwegian Secret Service and Navy” and prepare for the destruction of the pipeline. The team approached the Norwegians, who identified a shallow place close to the Danish Island of Bornholm where the explosives could be planted. According to Hersh [17], the team prepared to use the NATO BALTOPS 22 exercise [18], which was scheduled to take place east of Bornholm from 5-17 June 2022, as cover. The exercise was to be held exactly where the four pipelines passed through an area shallow enough to allow divers to plant the explosives. The overall theme of the exercise was “mine warfare” [19], an ideal cover to justify diving operations. It included a couple of US ships, among them the USS Kearsarge, capable of carrying midget submarines that may have been used by the divers [20].

By the end of the exercise, Hersh writes, the US Navy special divers had planted the explosives. They had used highly specialised deep-sea diving equipment with a mixture of helium in the tanks. These divers had nothing to do with the military exercise itself. According to German journalist Thomas Röper [21], their presence was confirmed by a BALTOPS coordinator for the divers. The divers were flown in by helicopter and brought deep-sea diving equipment with them, which the coordinator believed was MK29 [22], a rebreather system using a mixture of helium (as mentioned by Hersh) that had been developed by the Naval Warfare diving Centre in Panama City. Such equipment was neither necessary nor useful for divers in a mine warfare exercise, and their use of it had surprised the coordinator. These divers also met with the US Admiral and “with a group of American men in plain clothes, who arrived a few hours later”, according to the diving coordinator’s letter [23]. On the 1st of December 2022, I wrote an article in the Norwegian *Ny Tid*, where I pointed to the BALTOPS 22 exercise and the possible use of USS *Kearsarge*. The BALTOPS was the obvious cover, and almost everyone would understand that the perpetrators had used this exercise to plant the explosives, par-



Pipelaying vessel at work on Nord Stream 2. (Photo: Gazprom)

ticularly if the explosions were to take place shortly afterwards. The Americans therefore needed to develop a more sophisticated cover.

Norway and the US need for “plausible deniability”

The Americans had to come up with another layer of cover, which leads us to Norway. One might ask why the US would need Norwegian help to find out where to plant the explosives in the Baltic, since they could easily have found a suitable spot on their own. They could have run the whole operation by themselves and, actually, the people who were really familiar with the area were the Danes and the Swedes. It seems that the US approached the Norwegians, not because of their detailed knowledge of the Baltic, but for the purpose of establishing “plausible deniability”. The US needed a plausible “suspect”, if something were to go wrong. They needed a gas producer, whose profits would increase radically if its major Russian rival and its Nord Stream Pipeline were taken out. Norway was the perfect “fall guy”, the obvious suspect that the Americans could throw under the bus, if the need arose.

After the West had sanctioned Russia, the prices of oil and gas increased. Both American and Norwegian LNG produ-

cers made a fortune, which increased rapidly after the destruction of the Nord Stream pipelines on the 26th of September. After Sy Hersh’s article, people would say: “Of course, that is why Norway destroyed the pipeline”. Although this is not the way Norwegians think, it may very well be the reason why the US chose Norway for such a very sensitive operation. The US always seeks “plausible deniability” and someone with an interest in the case that could be presented as the “primary suspect”. If the US had approached the Swedes or the Danes, one would have asked: “Why did they do that?” In the US, one would ask: “Who benefits? Cui Bono?” And the answer would be easy to find: Norway. Meanwhile, the Norwegians, or rather a few senior officers, may have been convinced that they were making a valuable contribution to an extremely sensitive US covert operation, thereby gaining some kudos for Norway. The same logic applies in the criminal world when the guy on the street does dirty jobs for the mafia boss. This is how you gain acceptance and work your way to a higher position. This is a deeply tragic situation.

According to Sy Hersh, President Biden wanted to be able to trigger the explosions at a time of his own choosing. It would have been too obvious if the explosions had been triggered by a timer

shortly after the BALTOPS 22 exercise had ended. As a result, the American experts arranged for the explosives to be triggered by a specific “pulsed signal” from a sonar buoy that could be dropped in the area at any chosen time. By mid-September, many Germans were upset about the rising gas prices and about Chancellor Scholz closing Nord Stream 2. People were demanding that he open the pipeline. On the 16th of September Vladimir Putin suggested that one could always open up Nord Stream 2 if there were problems with the gas supply [24]. There was a concern in the US that the Germans would give in to popular demand and the US President felt the need to act.

From 22-24 September, two or more Swedish naval vessels operated in the area of the pipelines east of Bornholm, also at the exact positions of the upcoming explosions [25]. The ships had turned off their AIS transponders, a technical device showing their location, for 22 hours, indicating that their positions should not be revealed. Some Swedes had apparently been notified about the explosives. The Americans may have asked them to check whether everything was in order and they probably wanted to be sure that the explosives would not damage the Swedish electrical cable to Poland, which passes between and close to the two northern positions.

The Poseidons—Norwegian, British or American?

It may have been around midnight before the 26th of September, when the Americans allegedly used a Norwegian P-8A Poseidon to fly over the target area and drop the sonar buoy, which would send the signal to trigger the explosions after a certain delay controlled by a timer. This is what Sy Hersh’s sources claim [26]. It is more than likely that the Poseidon would have turned off its transponder to avoid anyone being able to track its trajectory during such a sensitive operation.

However, there is evidence that a P-8 Poseidon came in from the area of southern Norway during the night before the 26th of September (Monkey Werx flight tracking) [27]. The transponder was turned on and the aircraft could be tracked, although its specific identity was masked. The aircraft passed over northern Denmark at 01:45 in the night Central European Time (1:45 AM CET), flying towards the Baltic Sea over the southern tip of Sweden and then turned east towards Bornholm. According to the tracking information, this Poseidon's passage over the position of the detonation is estimated to have occurred at about 02:05 CET (according to the speaker voice, but we do not know if this estimate is correct; it might very well be 02:06 or 02:08 CET,

if we accept the time given by the flight tracking system).

According to Swedish seismic data, the first explosion was registered at 02:03 CET [28] (02:03.25; one minute and 35 seconds before the estimated passage above, which makes it unlikely that this aircraft could have been able to drop the buoy that triggered the explosion). The Poseidon then entered Polish territory at about 02:17 [29] and was refuelled for more than an hour over Poland by a US tanker aircraft KC-135R/K35R that came up from Spangdahlem Air Base in Germany. At about 03:30, the Poseidon went back over the Baltic Sea and circled east of Bornholm, from the position of the detonation in the west to the area further east, notably for more than three hours. The aircraft then went back over northern Denmark at 7:00 a.m., moving towards southern Norway.

The precise identity of this Poseidon is not known. This raises several questions:

First, this Poseidon could not have been the aircraft that triggered the explosion (or at least, not the first explosion), but must have been a Poseidon tasked with verifying the explosion. However, we still do not know whether this was a Norwegian Poseidon from Evenes Air Base in northern Norway or a US Poseidon flying from Keflavik, Iceland. Or was it a British Poseidon from the Royal Air Force Base Lossiemouth in north-eastern Scotland? A British or American plane could have gone eastwards towards the southern tip of Norway and then down to the southern tip of Sweden. A Norwegian Poseidon could easily be mistaken for a plane belonging to the US or the UK.

Second, why did this Poseidon keep circling in the area east of Bornholm for more than three hours? Circling over the southern Baltic in the middle of the night after the most devastating sabotage operation ever, would suggest that this aircraft had something to do with the operation. However, it can hardly have been the perpetrator—if it had been, it would have left the area as soon as possible. This “second Poseidon” apparently arrived in the area just after the first explosion. Its task might have been to confirm that the explosion had been executed and then survey the southern Baltic Sea to find out



A US Navy Poseidon P-8A at Sola Air Base, southern Norway in 2017. (Photo: Wikipedia)

whether there were any Russian ships or submarines in the vicinity that one could perhaps blame for the takeout.

Third, why did the aircraft refuel over Poland? The P-8A Poseidon is said to have a ferry range of 7,200 km without refuelling [30]. Flying from Evenes, from Scotland, or from Iceland to the southern Baltic Sea and back would not necessitate refuelling. In other words, circling over the southern Baltic in the middle of the night must have been part of the plan.

We can now conclude the following: A Poseidon responsible for an extremely delicate operation, like blowing up a pipeline, would not have its transponder turned on and would not hang around in the southern Baltic for three hours after the event. However, the Poseidon that appeared shortly afterwards and was visible to the flight trackers was almost certainly involved in the operation, possibly to verify the explosion and to survey the southern Baltic. And when this aircraft passed over the exact position of the explosion, it would, if it were a British Poseidon, have informed the British Headquarters in real time [31]. The British would then have contacted the Americans. The Secretary of the Russian Security Council, Nikolai Patrushev, said that this would then “confirm London’s involvement”.

In addition to this, an aircraft passing by just moments after the explosion took place could be taken as evidence that this particular Poseidon did not trigger the explosion. This fact could be used to discredit any claim that this particular Poseidon was the perpetrator. Its specific identity and nationality were masked, but not the fact that it was a Poseidon aircraft. A set-up of this nature could also suggest the use of a British or American Poseidon passing southern Norway on its way to Bornholm, thereby sending an ambiguous signal about the nationality of the plane. But let us first look at Norway’s capabilities.

Norway had recently bought five Poseidons from the US Navy. The first was delivered in November 2021 and arrived at Evenes Air Base (at Narvik, Northern Norway) in February 2022. A second Poseidon arrived at Evenes in March. The

third Poseidon arrived in May [32]. Flight training was supposed to start in March, but the testing of the aircraft forced them to postpone the training. Not until the 2nd of June did the first aircraft leave Evenes for training flights with a US-Norwegian crew. Training continued during 2022 and 2023, also at the US Naval Air Station in Jacksonville, Florida [33]. The last two aircraft were due to arrive in the summer of 2023. In August, Norway’s five Poseidon aircraft were expected to be operative and to replace the six P-3 Orion currently in use. They would perhaps also have been able to operate from the Royal Air Force Base Lossiemouth in Scotland [34]. A Norwegian aircraft not yet integrated into the Defence Forces can be seen as an opportunity to utilize it for other purposes.

In the 1970s, the Swedish SAAB had used a J-35 Draken that had not yet been handed over to the Swedish Air Force to approach the Soviet Baltic coast during the very week when the Soviet aircraft responsible for defence were engaged in an exercise close to the Urals. I was informed of this by Björn Eklind, the Deputy Chief of Swedish Defence Staff Intelligence. The Swedish J-35 triggered the Soviet air defence radars, enabling the Swedish signal intelligence agency to locate and register them. But for whom? Sweden had no plans to attack the Soviet Baltic coast. Most likely the Swedish SAAB did this on behalf of the US in exchange for some advanced technology or some other favours. A similar setup might have been devised with the use of a Norwegian Poseidon in a US special operation. There is an obvious advantage to using an aircraft that is not yet formally operative for such an operation, because you do not yet have to comply with all of the reporting requirements.

The US-Norwegian Intelligence Community

We can now conclude that quite a few people in the US would have been “in the know”. So would some Norwegians and probably some on the British side of the operation. And Sy Hersh wrote that some people “in Denmark and Sweden



Norway’s Chief of Intelligence, Major General Alf Roar Berg (1988-93), and his counterpart, the Director of the CIA and later Secretary of Défense, Robert Gates, together with US Ambassador Loret Miller Ruppe in Oslo, June 1992. (Photo: private archive)

were also briefed”. This was indicated by the Swedish naval operation between 22-24 September as well as by the Swedish claim that their investigation was so sensitive that neither the Russians nor the Germans or the Danes could be briefed [35]. All in all, this could only mean that this was an operation carried out by close allies or friends. This points to the US, the UK and, possibly, Norway. Perhaps also someone else, but this kind of information would still be too sensitive to be shared within NATO. During similarly sensitive operations in the 1980s, conducted by the US (the CIA and the Navy) and the UK [36], NATO as an organization was not involved, although several US and British NATO officers were informed. The destruction of the Nord Stream pipeline was probably very strictly a “need-to-know” operation.

Norwegian intelligence and the Norwegian Navy have had very close ties to the US for a long time. When the former chief of the Norwegian Intelligence Service (NIS), Major General Alf Roar Berg (1988-93), realised that people inside his Service did not make a distinction between the US and Norway, particularly many of the technical staff, Berg had to point it out to them and stress that Nor-

Director of Central Intelligence Robert Gates (1991-93) with Joe, wife of Norwegian Chief of Intelligence Alf Roar Berg, and Berg himself with Robert Gates' wife, Becky, June 1992. The towers of the Oslo City Council are visible in the background. Despite the very close US-Norwegian intelligence ties, there was, at the time, a recognition that the two states had very different interests (Photo: Private Archive).



way is a sovereign state, separate from the United States, and that Norway and the United States often have different interests. This became apparent in the 1980s, when the US pushed for its confrontational “Forward Maritime Strategy”, while Norway wanted to keep tensions low and avoid any provocative activity. At a NATO Intelligence Steering Committee meeting in the autumn of 1988, the British and US chiefs of defence intelligence claimed that war was “imminent”, and that this should be NATO’s official policy. Norway and General Berg were able to stop this by showing that Soviet readiness in the north had been considerably reduced. The US and UK had to back down and their attempt to prolong the Cold War was stopped by Norway. However, this Cold War experience has been forgotten. At the top level, Norwegians now speak about the United States as Norway’s closest ally, as if their interests were almost identical and as if Norway must follow the lead of the US. In 2022, the US succeeded in getting the Norwegian Parliament to accept four “Agreed Facilities and Areas” [37, 38], the naval base Ramsund and the airbases of Rygge, Sola and Evenes, which in practical terms are US military bases with US sovereignty and US police forces. When you talk to retired generals or admirals in Norway, they are not surprised that the US would try to use Norwegians for a special operation of any kind. The US have always tried to test how far they could push Norway.

If we assume that Seymour Hersh is right and that the US did use a Norwegi-

an Poseidon to go to the southern Baltic Sea around midnight of 25-26 September to drop the sonar buoy that triggered the explosion, would the Norwegians in the crew know about it? Not necessarily, though some senior Norwegian officers would most probably have known about the operation in some detail. To what extent had the political leadership been informed? Had Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Støre received a general briefing about the necessity of letting the United States use a Norwegian Poseidon in a US special operation and given permission for these aircraft with their very advanced equipment to operate? Did he know that they were going to destroy the Nord Stream pipeline? And if so, when did he discover that the pipeline would be taken out on the 26th September?

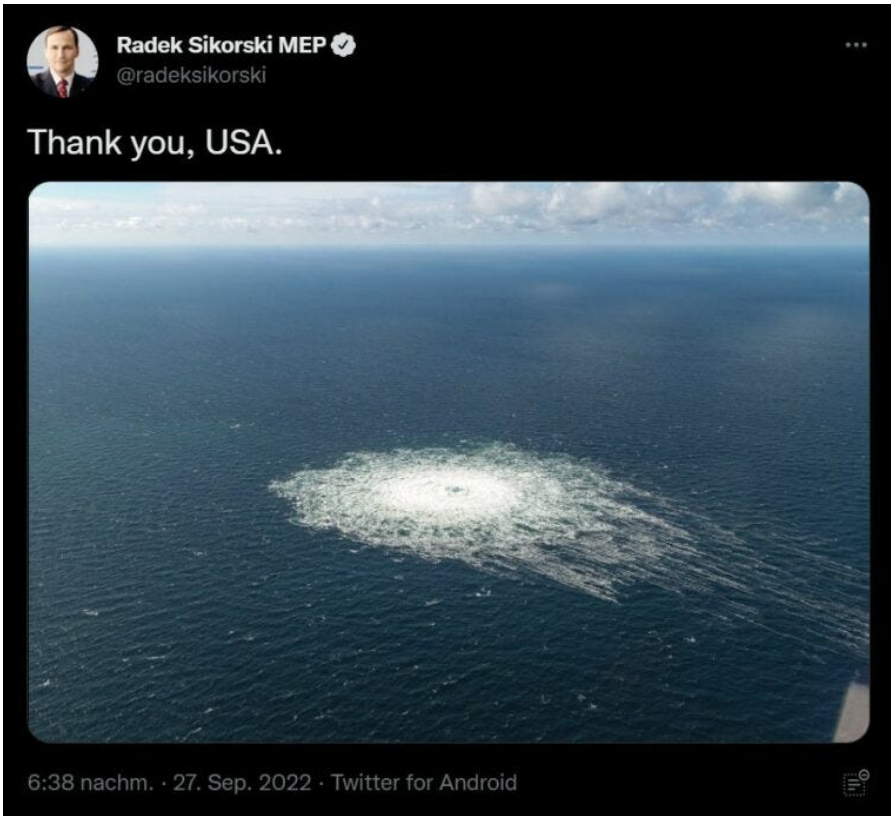
The Norwegian Prime Minister and the destruction of the pipeline

The inauguration of the new Baltic pipeline from Norway to Poland over Denmark was scheduled for the following day, the 27th of September, in the Polish city of Szczecin. The Norwegian, Danish, and Polish prime ministers as well as the Polish president had all been invited to attend. Because of Jonas Gahr Støre’s cancellation of the trip, we now know almost exactly when and who must have briefed him about the upcoming attack. Present at the inauguration in Szczecin were the Polish President Andrzej Duda, Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki, Da-

nish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen and some others like the Danish, Polish and Norwegian Ministers of Energy including Norwegian Terje Aasland. Prime Minister Støre was not present, despite the fact that this was a very high-profile Norwegian-Polish-Danish event, probably the most significant inauguration for Norway in recent years. Jonas Gahr Støre should have been there, but he wasn’t. *Euronews* [39], *Reuters*, *The New York Times* [40], *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, as well as Polish, Italian and other news agencies all showed images of the three top leaders: Duda, Morawiecki and Frederiksen — but no Norwegian.

On the 20th of September, the Norwegian Prime Minister’s Office had announced that Prime Minister Støre would go to Szczecin in Poland on the 27th of September for the inauguration of the “Baltic Pipe” [41], the Norwegian-Polish pipeline (Regjeringen.no, NTB, *ABC Nyheter*, *Nettavisen* [42], *Adressavisen*, *Dagsavisen* [43] and *Bergens Tidende*, 23 September). The Prime Minister’s Office edited the post on the 22nd of September, saying that the Minister of Oil and Energy, Aasland, would act as a substitute for the Prime Minister [44]. This notice was not published in the regular Government Calendar. The original notice concerning Støre’s trip to Szczecin was removed.

Where was Prime Minister Støre during these days? On Sunday, 18th September, Støre and his defence minister Bjørn Arild Gram went to the United States [45]. On the following day they visited the US aircraft carrier USS Gerald



Member of the European Parliament and former Minister of Defence and Foreign Affairs Radosław (Radek) Sikorski's Twitter comment "Thank you, USA", 27 September 2022.

R. Ford [46] and the NATO Joint Forces Command in Norfolk, close to Washington, DC. They were accompanied by the US Secretary of the Navy, Carlos Del Toro. They visited the headquarters of the US Second Fleet and of the NATO Command, where they also spoke with the Norwegian officers stationed there. In the evening, Prime Minister Støre met Nancy Pelosi and Mitch McConnell at the Congress [47]. On the 20th of September, Støre attended the opening of the UN General Assembly in New York [48] and had a meeting with the UN Secretary General António Guterres [49]. Støre delivered his speeches for Norway before the General Assembly [50] and at the Security Council on the 22nd of September [51], both on the same day. In the evening, before returning to Norway, he participated in a transatlantic foreign ministers' meeting led by Anthony Blinken.

In Norway, on the 22nd of September, the Prime Minister's Office issued a notice that Støre would be going to southern Norway [52] (Kristiansand/Arendal) on

the 26th of September to mark the founding of a new battery factory and meet pupils at a school competition [53]. On the 23rd of September, the Prime Minister's Office announced Støre's schedule for the next week [54]. Nothing was said about the inauguration of the Norwegian-Polish pipeline on the 27th of September, but the Ministry of Oil and Energy announced that Minister Terje Aasland would attend the ceremony in Szczecin on the 27th [55, 56]. Støre may have returned from the US on the 23rd. There are no reports for the weekend of 24-25 September. On the 26th of September, the day of the explosion, Støre was in the south of Norway, meeting with pupils in Kristiansand, as scheduled. Nothing is said about his whereabouts on the 27th of September. He would have had plenty of time to attend the inauguration in Szczecin. On the 28th of September, Støre gave two press conferences, one at 8.30 a.m. [57], accompanied by the Minister of Finance, and one at 3.30 p.m. [58], where he spoke about the sabotage of the Nord Stream pipe-

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HISTORISK ARKIV

Publisert under: Regjeringen Støre
Utgjevar: Statsministerens kontor

Statsministeren reiser til Polen

Pressemelding | Dato: 20.09.2022
Nr: 124/22

Statsminister Jonas Gahr Støre besøker Polen tysdag 27. september. På programmet står mellom anna opning av Baltic Pipe i Szczecin.

Statsministeren avlyser

Olje- og energiminister Terje Aasland reiser til Polen i steden for statsministeren, som måtte avlyse sin reise 22. september 2022.

Baltic Pipe er eit stort og strategisk viktig infrastrukturprosjekt. Prosjektet knyt Polen til eksisterande gassrør mellom Noreg og kontinentet, og vil bidra til å styrke forsyningsikkerheita til Polen og Danmark, samt andre land i Østersjøområdet og Aust-Europa. Under opninga deltek mellom andre Polens statsminister Mateusz Morawiecki og Danmarks statsminister Mette Frederiksen. Det vert også ein lunj med dei tre statsministrane.

Presse som ønskjer å følge statsministeren i Polen må akkreditere seg til ibm@smk.dep.no innan torsdag 22. september klokka 14.00. Eit oppdatert medieprogram vil bli sendt ut til akkrediterte etter fristen.

Pressekontakt er politisk rådgivar Emma Svarva Giskås, telefon 93 80 94 69, e-post esg@smk.dep.no og kommunikasjonsrådgivar Ingrid Brandal Myklebust, telefon 99 50 19 17, e-post ibm@smk.dep.no.

Press announcement by the Prime Minister's Office dated 20th September concerning Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Støre's trip to Poland on the 27th of September for the Norwegian-Polish-Danish inauguration of the Baltic Pipe. Two lines were added on the 22nd September, saying that the Minister of Oil and Energy, Terje Aasland, would replace Støre, who had had to cancel his trip to Poland (Norwegian Government Historical Archive).

lines. He also spoke of an increased threat towards Norwegian pipelines and the increased level of preparedness that would be needed to protect them [59]. Støre also had a telephone conversation with President Emmanuel Macron.

Støre's problem was the following: An attack on the Nord Stream pipelines on the 26th September would have made it impossible for him to attend the inauguration ceremony in Poland. His participation in Szczecin would have seemed like a Norwegian celebration of the destruction of Nord Stream. It would have seemed as though Norway was celebrating the elimination of Russia as its major gas competitor and as if Europe was now entering a new era with Russian gas

being replaced by Western gas—specifically by the Norwegian-Polish pipeline.

We know that Polish leaders were more than happy to celebrate the destruction of Nord Stream. The Polish Member of the European Parliament and Chair of its Delegation to the US, former Defence and Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski, wrote on Twitter on the 27th of September, soon after the attack on the pipeline: "Thank you, USA" [60]. In Norway, it would have caused a major outrage, had a Norwegian minister or politician expressed any such sentiment. A Norwegian prime minister would never make such a statement, not even secretly. Støre's presence in Szczecin would have been similarly outrageous, seeming to draw atten-

tion to the increase in Norway's profits following the destruction of the Russo-German pipelines. This would have been extremely embarrassing for Norway. It was therefore completely out of the question for Støre to attend the inauguration in Poland.

We must, therefore, ask the following question: When did Støre make the decision to cancel his trip to Szczecin? Or, more precisely, what happened between the 18th of September, when Prime Minister Støre left for the US and when the Prime Minister's Office, shortly after his departure, announced that he would attend the inauguration in Szczecin the following week, and the 22nd of September, when Støre's office notified the public that he had cancelled his participation in Szczecin? The time difference indicates that Støre probably informed Oslo about the cancellation on the 21st of September, shortly after he had had his first meeting in the US on the 19th of September. He must have been given some crucial information between the 19th and the 21st of September by the Secretary of the Navy, Carlos Del Toro, by the US Naval Command, or perhaps by the Speaker of the House, Nancy Pelosi. The meeting with Secretary General Guterres the next day would hardly be relevant in this case. We can thus conclude that the only credible explanation for Støre's cancellation of his visit to Szczecin must have been a briefing about the upcoming Nord Stream attack and that he was almost certainly briefed about it by Secretary Del Toro or by someone else on the 19th of September. He would then need a day or two to decide what to do about the inauguration ceremony in Poland.

Destroying Nord Stream on the 26th of September, the day before the inauguration of the Norwegian-Polish pipeline in Szczecin, could be seen as the ultimate insult to Norway. The timing would suggest that Norway was responsible and turn Norway into the "fall guy". Even worse, it could even be interpreted as a US-Norwegian declaration of war against Russia and Germany. This was a total turnaround of Norwegian policy from its former policy of reassurance and low tension during the Cold War to an obvious attack on Russia, which would lay Norway open to Russian

retaliation. The US Ambassador to Norway, Marc Nathanson, declared in March 2023 [61]: "Norway has been the best example. It's not just me who thinks so, but everyone in the Biden administration says the same: Norway has been best in class as an ally. You have taken responsibility and even changed your policy of not sending weapons [actually, this is true for several countries, author's comment]. Norway has also changed its security policy [...] Norway has been a first-class ally".

The Times and the attempt to bury the Hersh article

Exactly one month after Seymour Hersh's article, *The New York Times* [62], the *London Times*, the German *Die Zeit* [63], and ARD presented information pointing to a group of Ukrainian citizens (five men and one woman) that allegedly destroyed the pipeline using a small Polish sailing boat. *The New York Times* referred to anonymous "intelligence sources". The boat was said to have departed from the German city of Rostock on the 6th of September to plant the bombs. This was appeared almost simultaneously as "news" all over the world. In contrast to the reception of the Hersh article, all of the major news outlets took this story seriously, in spite of the fact that this article, just like Hersh's, merely cited "anonymous sources". It was obvious that some very influential people had pushed the publication of the second version in an attempt to bury the Hersh article. However, the new version can easily be disproved on at least four counts.

First, after the early Swedish and Danish investigations, there was already a consensus that the attack must have been executed by a state, a state with the capabilities for large, deep-sea underwater operations. For divers to go down and work in those depths, they would need a decompression chamber, else they would not survive [64]. This kind of equipment cannot be transported on a small sailing boat run by six people. *Second*, the Swedish Navy operation of 22-24 September over the exact positions of the future explosions is difficult to explain, unless Swedish intelligence was notified in ad-

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vance. Why did the Swedish naval vessels turn off their transponders for 22 hours? The Swedes must have been briefed by allied services. This does not point to private individuals. *Third*, how could the Swedish investigation be so sensitive that not even the Swedes could be given the information, not to mention the Russians, the Danes, or the Germans? If the perpetrators had been a team of private individuals, this restriction would not make sense. *Fourth*, it is almost impossible to imagine that Norwegian Prime Minister Støre would have cancelled his participation at this very important inauguration of the "Baltic Pipe" in Szczecin if he hadn't been briefed about the upcoming attack on the Nord Stream, probably at the US Naval Base in Norfolk on the 19th of September. The cancellation would not make sense if the perpetrators had been a small private group. There is evidence that some Norwegians were involved in one way or another.

There is enough evidence indicating that the story run by *The New York Times*, *Die Zeit* and *Times* was launched as a

cover to divert attention from Seymour Hersh's article. The "Times Story" has definitely been proven false, although it may have included some factually correct information. When very sophisticated covert operations of this nature are conducted, there will always be deliberately placed leads that point in different directions. Some journalists have claimed that the British had trained Ukraine divers for deep sea diving, specifically for an attack on the Nord Stream. This may very well be the case, but it cannot be done in a few months. The planning must have started a year or so earlier and it is most probably correct that the British were already involved at an early stage. However, that does not alter the general analysis about who planted the explosives and who triggered them. Professionals always use other players to create a few layers of cover stories in order to ensure the necessary "plausible deniability".