

Seymour Hersh: The Nord Stream Ghost Ship

The false details in the CIA's cover story.



Gas emanating from the Nord Stream 2 pipeline in the Baltic Sea, September 28, 2022. / Swedish Coast Guard.

By Seymour Hersh / [Substack](#)

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America's Central Intelligence Agency is constantly running covert operations around the world, and all must have a cover story in case things go badly, as they often do. It is just as important to have an explanation when things go well, as they did in the Baltic Sea last fall. Within weeks of my [report](#) that Joe Biden ordered the destruction of the Nord Stream pipelines, the agency produced a cover story and found willing takers in the *New York Times* and two major German publications.

By creating a story of deep sea divers and a crew who did not exist, the agency was following protocol, and the story would have been part of the first days of secret planning to destroy the pipelines. The essential element was a mythical yacht ironically named the *Andromeda*—after the beautiful daughter of a mythical king who was chained to a rock, naked. The cover story was shared with and supported by the BND, Germany’s federal intelligence service.

My initial report received coverage around the world but was ignored by the major newspapers and television networks in the United States. As the story gained traction in Europe and elsewhere abroad, the *New York Times* on March 7 published a [report](#) quoting US officials asserting that American intelligence had accumulated information suggesting that a pro-Ukrainian group sabotaged the pipelines. The story said officials who had “reviewed” the new intelligence depicted it to be “a step toward determining responsibility” for the pipeline sabotage. The *Times* story got worldwide attention, but nothing more has been heard since from the newspaper about who did what. In an interview for a *Times* podcast, one of the three authors of the article inadvertently explained why the story was dead on arrival. The writer was asked about the involvement of the alleged pro-Ukrainian group: “What makes you think that’s what happened?” He answered: “I should be very clear that we know really very little. Right?”

On April 3 the *Washington Post* [reported](#) that some European investigators now doubt that the *Andromeda* could have sabotaged the pipelines without the help of a second vessel. Some in Europe wondered if the role of the *Andromeda* was “something to distract or only part of the picture.” The article did not suggest that the Biden Administration was involved in the destruction of the pipeline, but it did quote an unnamed European diplomat saying that everyone can see there is a body lying there, but all are pretending things are normal. “It’s better not to know,” the diplomat said. No American officials were quoted, even anonymously, by the *Post*. The Biden administration has become a Nord Stream-free reporting zone.

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Chalk one up for the various CIA officials who have been supplying phony stories to the media here and abroad in what has been a successful effort to keep the world focused on any possible suspects outside of what has emerged as the most logical one—the president of the United States.

The *Times* also reported that a European lawmaker briefed by his country’s intelligence agencies said that the service was gathering intelligence on roughly forty-five ships whose transponders were not working when they passed the area where the pipelines were blown up. One of the so-called ‘ghost ships’ could have planted the mines and later pulled the trigger.

After the *Times* story went online, *Die Zeit*, Germany’s largest newspaper, rushed to publish a [report](#) on an investigation into the Nord Stream bombing that it had been researching for months, in conjunction with a public television network. The weekly had something new: it identified a yacht that, it reported, was “rented from a company in Poland, apparently owned by two Ukrainians.” The group leasing the yacht and carrying out the destruction of the pipeline was said to include a captain, two divers, two diving assistants, and a doctor. Depicted

by *Die Zeit* as “assassins” whose names were not published or known, the group used forged passports and had transported the needed explosives to the crime scene. The yacht was said to have sailed near the Danish island of Bornholm, which is close to the site of the pipeline sabotage.

The newspaper reported that the yacht had been returned to the company that leased it—such yachts can two thousand dollars per week or more to rent—in an “uncleaned condition” that enabled German investigators to find traces of an explosive on a cabin table. Later stories said that investigators also had found two fraudulent Ukrainian passports left on the yacht. A subsequent story in *Der Spiegel*, the German weekly magazine, said that the yacht in question was named the *Andromeda*.

I subsequently published a [story](#) suggesting that the information supplied by German federal police to both *Die Zeit* and *Der Spiegel* had originated with US intelligence. The author of the *Die Zeit* report, Holger Stark, an experienced journalist whom I have known since he worked in Washington a decade or so ago, contacted me to complain about the assertion. Stark told me he had excellent sources in the German federal police and learned what he did from those links, and not from any intelligence agency, German or American. I believed him and immediately corrected the story.

I acknowledge that it’s difficult for any journalist to write about a fellow journalist, especially a good one. But this case involves the acceptance of facts that should have been questioned. For example, I did not ask Stark if he wondered why an American newspaper nearly four thousand miles away would publish the same allegation about a group of unnamed Ukrainians, who were not linked to the leadership in Kiev, that officials in Germany said they had been chasing. We did discuss a fact that he brought up: that officials in Germany, Sweden, and Denmark had decided shortly after the pipeline bombings to send teams to the site to recover the one mine that has not gone off. He said they were too late; an American ship had sped to the site within a day or two and recovered the mine and other materials. I asked him why he thought the Americans had been so quick to get to the site and he answered, with a wave of his hand, “You know what Americans are like. Always wanting to be first.” There was another very obvious explanation.

The trick of a good propaganda operation is to provide the targets—in this case the Western media—with what they want to hear. One intelligence expert put it to me more succinctly: “When you do an operation like the pipelines, you need to plan a counter-op—a red herring that has a whiff of reality. And it must be as detailed as possible to be believed.”

“People today have forgotten that there is such a thing as a parody,” the expert said. “Gilbert and Sullivan’s *HMS Pinafore* is not a history of the Royal Navy in the 19th Century. It’s a parody. The CIA’s goal in the pipeline case was to produce a parody that was so good that the press would believe it. But where to start? Cannot have the pipelines destroyed by a bomb from an airplane or sailors on a rubber boat.

“But why not a sailboat? Any serious student of the event would know that you cannot anchor a sailboat in waters that are 260 feet deep”—the depth at which the four pipelines were destroyed—“but the story was not aimed at him but at the press who would not know a parody when presented with one.”

The intelligence expert listed all the elements needed before any individual or group could charter an expensive yacht. “You cannot just walk off the street with a fake passport and lease a boat. You either need to accept a captain who was supplied by the leasing agent or owner of the yacht, or have a captain who comes with a certificate of competency as mandated by maritime law. Anyone who’s ever chartered a yacht would know that.” Similar proof of expertise and competence for deep sea diving involving the use of Nitox, a specialized mix of oxygen and nitrogen would be required by the divers and the doctor.

The expert had more questions about the alleged yacht. “How does a 49-foot sailboat find the pipelines in the Baltic Sea? The pipelines are not that big and they are not on the charts that come with the lease. Maybe the thought was to put the two divers into the water”—not very easy to do so from a small yacht—“and let the divers look for it. How long can a diver stay down in their suits? Maybe fifteen minutes. Which means it would take the diver four years to search one square mile.

“None of these questions is asked by the media. So you have six people on the yacht—two divers, two helpers, a doctor and a captain leasing the boat. One thing is missing—who is going to crew the yacht? Or cook? What about the logbook that the leasing company must keep for legal reasons?

“None of this happened,” the expert told me. “Stop trying to link this to reality. It’s a parody.”

The stories in the *New York Times* and the European press have given no indication that any journalist was able to board and physically examine the yacht in question. Nor do they explain why any passengers on a yacht would leave passports, fraudulent or otherwise, on board after a rental. There have been photographs of a sailboat in dry dock named *Andromeda* published.

None of this can save a bad cover story, the intelligence expert told me. “The effort to turn fiction into truth will go on forever. Now it’s a picture of a sailboat that appears after the investigation that can’t be traced—with no license number where it legally should be. The *Andromeda* has replaced the Piltown man in the press.”

The expert had one final thought: “In the world of professional analysts and operators everyone will universally and correctly conclude from your story that the devilish CIA concocted a counter-op that is on its face so ridiculous and childish that the real purpose was to reinforce the truth.”