

Attack on Nord Stream Kills Prospects for Dialogue in Ukraine

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Global Research, October 02, 2022

[Indian Punchline](#) 28 September 2022

Region: [Europe](#), [Russia and FSU](#), [USA](#)

Theme: [Intelligence](#), [Oil and Energy](#)

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The three [leaks that were discovered on Monday](#) at the Nord Stream 1 and Nord Stream 2 gas pipelines connecting Russia with Germany — one after another within hours of each other in the exclusive economic zones of Sweden and Denmark — were caused by blasts. Swedish Foreign Minister Ann Linde tweeted that the blasts “are consequences of detonations, probably caused by sabotage. We continue to collect information and do not rule out any cause, actor or motive.”

Swedish Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson shared the same opinion and described the event as “a matter of sabotage,” adding that no version is currently being ruled out. Prime Minister of Denmark Mette Frederiksen has since been quoted by Reuters as saying,

“It is now the clear assessment by authorities that these are deliberate actions. It was not an accident.”

Earlier, the Danish authorities issued a statement that the pipeline incidents were not caused by an accident.

Meanwhile, Radoslaw Sikorski, a European Parliament member and a former Polish foreign minister, has [thanked the US for damaging the Nord Stream](#) pipelines.

“A small thing, but so much joy,” Sikorski tweeted, adding, “Thank you, USA.”

Sikorski cited US President Joe Biden who had threatened on February 7 before Russia began its military operation in Ukraine, that if Moscow acted against Kiev, “there will no longer be a Nord Stream 2. We will bring an end to it.” When a journalist asked Biden to clarify, he said enigmatically: “I promise you, we will be able to do that.”

Indeed, there are reports that two groups of US warships were sighted recently within 30 kms of the site of the incident where Nord Stream was attacked.

According to Sikorski, the damage to the Nord Stream narrowed Russia's room for maneuver, since Moscow will now have to talk to the countries controlling the Druzhba and Yamal gas pipelines — Ukraine and Poland respectively — to resume gas supplies to Europe.

The German security services are of the opinion that only a state actor could have damaged the undersea pipeline, suggesting “divers or a mini-submarine” could have installed mines or explosives on the pipeline. When asked to comment, the US Secretary of State Antony Blinken was non-committal saying “these are initial reports (of sabotage) and we haven't confirmed them yet. But if it is confirmed, that's clearly in no one's interest.”

From the US perspective, [as Blinken put it](#), while there are “clear challenges in the months ahead” in terms of Europe's energy supply, “there is also a very significant opportunity to do two things.” The first is to “finally end the dependence of Europe on Russian energy” and the second is to “accelerate the transition to renewables” so the West can address the “climate challenge.”

Clearly, for Washington, going ahead, the priority is to impose a price cap on Russian oil exports and “surge” supplies of LNG to Europe at a juncture when the US became the world's largest LNG exporter this year, partly due to the embargo against Russia imposed by the West. And the price cap decision needs EU endorsement.

The geopolitical ramifications are self-evident. The attack on the Nord Stream took place even as the referendum got under way on Monday in the Donbass, Zaporozhye and Kherson on these regions' accession to Russia. On Sunday, Biden had issued a strong statement saying the US will never recognise Ukrainian territory as anything other than part of Ukraine and that “Russia's referenda are a sham.”

The point is, as Sikorski pointed out, with Nord Stream lethally damaged, if Russia were to resume gas supply to Germany in the conceivable future, it can only be through the Soviet-era pipelines that run through Poland and Ukraine. But Warsaw and Kiev will not be in a mood to cooperate in the prevailing circumstances.

Principally, Russia loses whatever leverage it has over German policies at a juncture when a grave economic crisis looms ahead and there is growing demand to review Berlin's decision against the commissioning of Nord Stream 2. Last week, large demonstrations took place in Germany calling for the commissioning of Nord Stream 2 to resolve energy shortage.

As for the German leadership, it too no longer has an option to bite the bullet and seek resumption of Russian gas supplies (except by begging Poland and Ukraine to cooperate in the reopening of the Yamal and Druzhba pipelines.) On the other hand, Chancellor Scholz's trip to the Gulf region (Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Qatar) last weekend seeking more oil supplies failed to produce the results he had hoped for.

Saudi Arabia, which is aligned with Russia on regulating oil output, maintains an ambiguous position on the global stage as the West confronts Russia over total energy independence. In the UAE, Scholz achieved somewhat better results by signing an agreement on energy security, which provides for delivery of LNG before the end of 2022.

From another perspective, the Nord Stream pipelines have been disabled at a defining moment in the Ukraine conflict when a lull is expected through the fall until December.

Conceivably, this presents a small window of opportunity for dialogue with Moscow. There are rumours that Scholz's Gulf tour also aimed at seeking help from Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman who has excellent relations with Russian President Vladimir Putin. (Prince Salman recently got the prisoner exchange arranged recently between Moscow and Kiev where according to a [report in the Wall Street Journal](#) on Sept 23, the Russian oligarch and politician Roman Abramovich acted as intermediary.)

The bottom line is, in any architecture for dialogue between Europe and Russia, the resumption of Russian energy supplies to ease the economic crisis in Europe would be a leitmotif. Therefore, whoever struck Nord Stream struck had a perfect sense of timing. This dastardly act is state-sponsored and it only highlights that there are powerful forces in the West who want the conflict to prolong and will go the whole hog, no matter what it takes, to smother any incipient stirrings that aspire for ceasefire and dialogue.

Such a "deliberate act of sabotage" needed much advance planning. Unsurprisingly, the Kremlin says it is "is extremely concerned about the incident." What has happened is of a piece with the Anglo-American sabotage of the Istanbul agreement between Kiev and Moscow in late March, which extended the war by five months.

In the present case, the war lobby has removed the pontoon bridge and made sure that European countries have no means to retrace now to source Russian gas and salvage their economies. As the Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban remarked sarcastically, the American oil companies have become "war profiteers." The US not only replaced the Russian energy supplier but is forcing the Europeans to pay 8-10 times the contracted price with Gazprom.

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