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Questions continue to swirl about who blew up the Nord Stream pipelines in September. Last month, the legendary investigative journalist Seymour Hersh reported the sabotage was carried out by the U.S. Navy with remotely triggered explosives during NATO exercises. The U.S. has denied the claim. We speak to The Intercept's Jeremy Scahill about his latest article, "Conflicting Reports Thicken Nord Stream Bombing Plot."

JUAN GONZÁLEZ: I wanted to ask you about the Nord Stream pipeline. You recently wrote a [piece](#) in *The Intercept* dissecting and analyzing the Sy Hersh explosive [report](#). Could you talk about that?

JEREMY SCAHILL: Well, you know, first of all, I think it should be said that Seymour Hersh is one of the greatest generations — one of the greatest journalists in American history, with a very, very long track record of breaking stories of great consequence on American war crimes, American covert operations. And I think that that often gets lost in the shuffle in people's confirmation bias-inspired attacks on Sy Hersh's stories. You could argue, for sure, that a single-source story, that appears to have a bunch of details in it that are contradicted by open-source intelligence on ship movements and plane movements — they're all legitimate questions to raise, and I don't pretend to know the answer of what happened to the Nord Stream pipeline, and I also have my own questions about some of the citations in Sy's reporting. But here's what I will say with confidence: I know that if Seymour Hersh has a source that he believes has credible access to intelligence and he reports it and reports those assertions, that there is a there there, that it is worth pursuing, it is worth looking at.

So, what I tried to do in my story was give some context to what it's like to work with confidential sources. And one thing that we know is that very few people in government have access to every detail of a covert operation or every detail of a secret program. And sometimes what happens is that sources know what they know, and they share that, but they mix it with speculation, or they mix it with things that were being discussed as a potential plan. I think it's plausible that Hersh may have some of the details wrong, not because Sy Hersh himself is sloppy but because sources sometimes don't delineate what they know to be true from what is

speculation. It's also possible that this was one of the plans that was being discussed within the Biden administration as part of a secret task force and that they ended up operating the plan in a different manner. There's a number of questions that I think we should be asking.

But what I think is the central, most important assertion is that Sy Hersh has a source, that he believes is legitimate and real and has information that is true, who is asserting that the United States carried out this operation or sponsored this operation. And I think that the dismissal of Sy Hersh by so many people is reckless. It also shows a total disregard for the history of American covert operations. And it ultimately seeks to silence people who are questioning what I think is quite clearly the top suspect in this international act of terrorism, and that is the party that would have the greatest motivation to conduct this attack. And that would be United States.

AMY GOODMAN: I wanted to go to what Russian President Vladimir Putin said, the bombing of the Nord Stream carried out at the, quote, "state level." He didn't directly blame the United States but pointed out the U.S. had an interest in the pipelines being blown up.

PRESIDENT VLADIMIR PUTIN: [translated] Who is interested? Theoretically, the United States is interested, of course, in order to stop the supply of Russian energy carriers to the European market and supply volumes of their own, including liquefied natural gas.

AMY GOODMAN: So, that's Vladimir Putin, Jeremy. If you could, for people who aren't following this closely, summarize what the major news outlets are saying, whether we're talking about *Die Zeit* in Germany, a pro-Ukrainian group, Russia, whether we're talking about *The New York Times* or Sy Hersh, what each is contending?

JEREMY SCAHILL: Yeah. Well, so, of course, Seymour Hersh says that this was a United States operation, that was covert in nature, although it, according to Hersh, once Joe Biden, in February — on February 7, 2022, Joe Biden has a meeting in the East Room of the White House, a press conference, with the new German Chancellor Olaf Scholz. And during that press conference, Biden is asked about the Nord Stream pipeline, and he says, you know, "We will shut it down. We will get it done. We will end it. I promise you that."

And what Hersh is saying is that once Biden said that, that the operation that was intended to be a covert operation under Title 50 of the U.S. Code, which means that if the president issues a secret presidential finding, that the U.S., for interests of its national security, has to conduct an operation and keep it secret, that under the law, the president of the United States is required to inform the Senate and House Intelligence Committees or, at a minimum, the so-called Gang of Eight, which would be the chairs of the Senate and House Intelligence Committees and then the leadership in both the Senate and the House. And what Hersh is saying is that once Biden let the cat out of the bag by sort of saying, you know, we're going to do this — Biden, of course, didn't say we're going to go blow up the pipeline, but, you know, you could read into it very easily that Biden was saying, one way or the other, we're taking this thing out — that then the CIA and others said, "Well, this can't be a covert operation in that manner," so they shifted it to a military operation that would fall under Title 10 of the U.S. Code. And in that case, you do not have the same congressional reporting requirements to the intelligence committees. So, according to Hersh, they were able to circumvent informing Congress because of this distinction.

Now, I talked to lawyers, including the top lawyer for the director of national intelligence under Barack Obama, Robert Litt, who was saying that even with those semantics, that this kind of an operation would fall clearly under covert action statutes, and was questioning the veracity of that claim that no one from Congress would have been informed. But all of that aside, and I think it's just important to understand the distinctions for how covert actions are authorized — and by the way, Joe Biden, as a young senator, played a role in establishing these rules that now govern covert operations and in setting up the Intelligence Committee. He was a founding member of the Senate Intelligence Committee in the 1970s.

So, what Hersh is alleging is that this was a secret operation, with the support of the Norwegian government, and that it was done under cover of a NATO — a well-publicized NATO training operation and involved deep-sea divers who were part of the vanilla U.S. Navy, not Special Operations Command, because then, again, it would have had to be reported to members of Congress, and that they then placed the explosives on portions of the pipeline that they had identified as a particularly good place to disrupt it and sabotage it, and then they detonated it.

That was immediately attacked by a lot of commentators online, a lot of other journalists, but, interestingly, was never — and still to this moment has never gotten a fair hearing in *The New York Times*

or
The Washington Post
. In fact, last week, when
The New York Times
published a story, that reverberated around the world, asserting that U.S. intelligence believes

that — or, is zeroing in on what they called a pro-Ukrainian group that may have been involved with attacking or sabotaging the Nord Stream pipeline, they for the first time mentioned Seymour Hersh's report, and it was in the 23rd graph of their story, and they didn't even make any assertion of what Sy actually said. They were mentioning it as though Sy had just done a blog post referencing Joe Biden's, you know, perceived public threat.

And I think what was clear to me, as a follower of both *The New York Times* and U.S. covert action, is that there are elements within the U.S. intelligence community who are spinning this story, and they're doing it for one of two reasons: either to distract from Hersh's report or because this is representative of some sort of a deception operation or an attempt to put together a false flag, where you have the appearance that these individuals did it, and that is intended to mask the actual sponsor of the operation.

And at the same time that *The New York Times* does its story, a consortium of German journalists from different publications, including

Die Zeit

, published a story that was not based on intelligence reporting but was based on the federal criminal investigation that Germany is doing into the destruction of the Nord Stream pipeline. And they then offered more details from the German investigation, that there was a private boat that had been rented by a — from a Ukrainian-owned company and that explosives had been transported by land over Poland and through Germany and placed onto this, what essentially was just a kind of sailboat with a 75 horsepower motor, and that this boat carried six individuals — some divers and a doctor — and that they went out into the sea and that they were the ones that actually placed the explosives on it.

Now, what's interesting, Amy — and you [asked](#) Sy Hersh about this on his show about some of the open-source intelligence researchers who called into question parts of his story — some of those same people then started to go to town in dissecting the inconsistencies of the reporting from

Die Zeit and the findings, as they were relayed in the papers in Germany, from the German Federal Police about how such a small team of divers would have been able to do this, how they would have transported the volume of explosives. You know, we're talking about hundreds upon hundreds of pounds of explosives that were alleged to have been used in this operation, a military level of explosive devices. So, I don't know that this

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, this ship, was or wasn't involved with it, but in many ways it really reeks of a disinformation operation. It's totally plausible that these individuals on that boat were involved in some capacity. But even the German defense minister himself, in response to these reports, has said that he would give equal weight to the theory that they were involved with the attack and that they were — or that they were part of a false flag operation.

Now, I would say the top suspect in this should just logically be the United States. Many of the same principles that I could offer in analyzing this private boat scenario could also apply to Russia. It's just that the case that Russia would have had the motive to do this is much flimsier than the case that the United States would have or that Ukraine would have. What I think is a theory that — and again, this is just speculation on my part, but it's informed speculation — is that I wouldn't be shocked if we at some point learn that the United States sponsored this operation using deniable assets for plausible deniability and that some elements of Ukrainian forces, whether they're private or official, were involved or if not carried out the operation. I think that would be the most logical line of inquiry. I'm not saying I know that to be true. I'm saying if I was running an investigation on this, I would be looking at who benefits and who has the capacity to do such a sophisticated operation.

JUAN GONZÁLEZ: Well, Jeremy, in line with that issue of the sophisticated operation, I don't know if you saw the [piece](#) that Scott Ritter, the former U.N. weapons inspector, wrote in *Consortium News* yesterday. But he totally debunks this idea that this small boat, as you say, could have been involved in this, not only because of the number — the amount of explosives necessary to destroy those pipelines, which were highly reinforced in concrete, as well, but he also says that they were at 240 feet below the level of the water, and that he says a rule of thumb is that decompression takes approximately one day per 100 feet of sea water plus a day. This means that the team of divers would have required three days of decompression per dive. But to decompress, you need a decompression chamber. And if there were two divers involved, they would have to have had two decompression chambers and all the oxygen necessary, and it's impossible to have fit all that stuff on this little boat. So he says that it is clearly, from his perspective, a cover story to hide who really was involved. I'm wondering your thoughts about that.

JEREMY SCAHILL: Yeah, I mean, we don't even need to cite Scott Ritter on those points. I mean, you've had naval warfare experts that have called into question almost every single part of that narrative, the narrative meaning that the actual divers were on this small ship and went down to place the explosives. I mean, if you speak to people who are experts at diving, either on the civilian end or, more relevant, on the military end, it really does not add up.

And so, then the question becomes: Why is this story being pushed? You know, it's interesting. This hasn't gotten much play in the United States, but in European media, there's a lot of reporting indicating that a name is going to come out about the person who potentially sponsored this component of the operation. And I think that the fact that the German defense minister is stating that it's like 50/50 that this thing was a false flag is a pretty good indication that that dominant narrative that's been pushed, that this was sort of the attackers and they

used this ship and they did it by themselves, it just doesn't pass the smell test. So, you know, you don't even need to get into political rhetoric or having any other theory about it just to say the facts just don't make any sense on a technical level that that specific ship could have been the sole party responsible for blowing this up.

AMY GOODMAN: Jeremy Scahill, we want to thank you for being with us, senior reporter and correspondent at *The Intercept*, author of *Blackwater: The Rise of the World's Most Powerful Mercenary Army* and the book *Dirty Wars: The World Is a Battlefield*, on which the Oscar-nominated film *Dirty Wars* is based. We'll link to your new [piece](#), "Conflicting Reports Thicken Nord Stream Bombing Plot."