

How the US Blew up a Russian Gas Pipeline in Siberia, 1982.

Description

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By David E. Hoffman February 27, 2004.

?In January 1982, President Ronald Reagan approved a CIA plan to sabotage the economy of the Soviet Union through covert transfers of technology that contained hidden malfunctions, including software that later triggered a huge explosion in a Siberian natural gas pipeline, according to a memoir by a Reagan White House official.

Thomas C. Reed, a former Air Force secretary who was serving in the National Security Council at the time, describes the episode in "At the Abyss: An Insider's History of the Cold War," published by Ballantine Books. Reed writes that the pipeline explosion was just one example of "cold-eyed economic warfare" against the Soviet Union that the CIA carried out under Director William J. Casey during the final years of the Cold War.

At the time, the United States was attempting to block Western Europe from importing Soviet natural gas. There were also signs that the Soviets were trying to steal a wide variety of Western technology.

"In order to disrupt the Soviet gas supply, its hard currency earnings from the West, and the internal Russian economy, the pipeline software that was to run the pumps, turbines, and valves was programmed to go haywire, after a decent interval, to reset pump speeds and valve settings to produce pressures far beyond those acceptable to pipeline joints and welds," Reed writes.

"The result was the most monumental non-nuclear explosion and fire ever seen from space," he recalls, adding that U.S. satellites picked up the explosion. Reed said in an interview that the blast occurred in the summer of 1982.

Reed said he obtained CIA approval to publish details about the operation. The CIA learned of the full extent of the KGB's pursuit of Western technology in an intelligence operation known as the Farewell Dossier. Portions of the operation have been disclosed earlier, including in a 1996 paper in *Studies in Intelligence*, a CIA journal. The paper was written by Gus W. Weiss, an expert on technology and intelligence who was instrumental in devising the plan to send the flawed materials and served with Reed on the National Security Council. Weiss died Nov. 25 at 72.

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