



What WikiLeaks reveals about the lead-up to the Ukraine war

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Magnus von Wangenheim: Hello and thank you for tuning in. My name is Magnus von Wangenheim and in this video I would like to show you what the disclosures of WikiLeaks reveal about the lead-up to the Ukraine war. Thanks to WikiLeaks, we have access to tens of thousands of embassy dispatches written by American ambassadors from around the world between 1966 and February 2010. These classified dispatches contain conversations with political decision-makers, as well as analyses and assessments of the situation in the respective countries. They were leaked to WikiLeaks by a whistleblower and published by WikiLeaks in cooperation with major newspapers starting in 2010. So let's use this unique opportunity to see how diplomats and politicians from Russia, the US, Germany and other countries have assessed the situation in Ukraine. These embassy dispatches give us unique insights into the analyses and intentions of politicians and provide answers to the questions of whether Russian, American and German politicians foresaw the conflict in Ukraine and whether Ukraine's accession to NATO was really being pursued by the West. Furthermore, they show us the view of Russian politicians as well as the position of the German government under Merkel regarding Ukraine. The analysis of the embassy dispatches does not, of course, provide us with an all-encompassing view of all the factors that contributed to the Ukrainian war, since we only have the embassy dispatches written up to the beginning of 2010. However, they do show us the factors that led to tensions at the time between the U.S. and Ukraine on the one hand, and Russia on the other. A discussion of the extent to which these factors and points of contention that led to tensions back then are partly responsible for today's tensions and war could be very revealing.

I want to point out that under each embassy dispatch presented in this video, you will find the title of the original document. If you would like to read through the original document yourself, simply enter that title into an Internet search engine, which should bring up the corresponding WikiLeaks page. Alternatively, there is a PDF document linked below this video where you can find the links to all the documents mentioned here.

1. Were politicians aware of the risk of conflict? [the titles serve

only for orientation and are not read out loud]

Let's start with the question to what extent politicians were aware of the potential for conflict in Ukraine. Let's take a look at the notes of the U.S. ambassador in Moscow in February 2008. His notes are titled "Nyet means nyet - no means no - Russia's red lines on NATO expansion." The US Ambassador writes:

Ukraine and Georgia's NATO aspirations not only touch a raw nerve in Russia, they engender serious concerns about the consequences for stability in the region. Not only does Russia perceive encirclement, and efforts to undermine Russia's influence in the region, but it also fears unpredictable and uncontrolled consequences which would seriously affect Russian security interests. Experts tell us that Russia is particularly worried that the strong divisions in Ukraine over NATO membership, with much of the ethnic-Russian community against membership, could lead to a major split, involving violence or at worst, civil war. In that eventuality, Russia would have to decide whether to intervene; a decision Russia does not want to have to face. [1]

So much for the assessment of the American ambassador in Moscow. In the same dispatch, the view of Dmitriy Trenin, Deputy Director of the Moscow Carnegie Center, is also reflected:

Trenin (...) expressed concern that Ukraine was, in the long-term, the most potentially destabilizing factor in U.S.-Russian relations, given the level of emotion and neuralgia triggered by its quest for NATO membership. [1]

(...)

Trenin expressed concern that elements within the Russian establishment would be encouraged to meddle, stimulating U.S. overt encouragement of opposing political forces, and leaving the U.S. and Russia in a classic confrontational posture. [1]

In a June 2008 dispatch, the aforementioned Mr. Trenin of the Moscow Carnegie Center also expressed ...

... considerable concern over the lack of consensus on the issue of NATO membership in Ukraine, where western Ukrainians saw Russia as a historic aggressor, while a large number of Ukrainians saw Russia more benignly: "a separate country, but not a foreign country," in Trenin's words. Should Ukraine pursue NATO membership, Trenin feared that this divide would widen and lead to violence. [2]

Interestingly, the records of the American ambassadors contain similar warnings from Germany and France. I will show you the concerns of German politicians in detail in a moment. First, here is a statement from the French president's foreign policy adviser, who warned in September 2005 that ...

the question of Ukrainian accession to NATO remained extremely sensitive for Moscow, and concluded that if there remained one potential cause for war in Europe, it was Ukraine. He

added that some in the Russian administration felt we were doing too much in their core zone of interest. [3]

So one thing is very clear from the embassy dispatches: The U.S., other NATO countries and Russia were aware of the great potential for conflict that NATO's expansion into Ukraine holds. But was Ukraine's accession to NATO really being pursued by the West?

2. Was Ukraine's accession to NATO really pursued by the West?

For this, we again take a look at the records of the U.S. ambassadors. That the U.S. was seeking NATO expansion into Ukraine is made most clear in a September 2009 dispatch from the U.S. ambassador in Kiev, which, under the heading "the way forward," states that analysts consider the following point essential:

Pursue western integration and NATO enlargement deliberately, but quietly: There is no prospect of rapid movement on this front, and we can agree to (firmly) disagree with the GOR while continuing our efforts to promote Ukraine's integration with the West ... [4]

3. Viewpoints from Russia

Let us now see how this attempt to integrate Ukraine into NATO was perceived in Russia. In a February 2008 dispatch, the U.S. ambassador notes:

Foreign Minister Lavrov and other senior officials have reiterated strong opposition, stressing that Russia would view further eastward expansion as a potential military threat. NATO enlargement, particularly to Ukraine, remains "an emotional and neuralgic" issue for Russia, but strategic policy considerations also underlie strong opposition to NATO membership for Ukraine and Georgia. In Ukraine, these include fears that the issue could potentially split the country in two, leading to violence or even, some claim, civil war [1]

(...)

Lavrov stressed, that ...

... while Russia might believe statements from the West that NATO was not directed against Russia, when one looked at recent military activities in NATO countries they had to be evaluated not by stated intentions but by potential. [1]

Let's look at another statement from the Russian side, this time from Grigory Karasin, the Russian deputy foreign minister, who said in March 2008 that ...

Karasin asserted that the U.S. and NATO had to choose "what kind of Russia" that it wanted to deal with -- "a Russia that is stable and ready to calmly discuss issues with the U.S., Europe and China, or one that is deeply concerned and filled with nervousness." He then framed the issue another way by asking whether the goal of the U.S. and NATO was to "push all the former Soviet countries, including Belarus, into NATO in an effort to isolate

Russia or make the rational and realistic choice of allowing these countries to "remain free" and engage both with the West and Russia." Karasin argued that the international community had reached a crossroads and "the future" in many ways depends on the strategic choice that the U.S. makes. [5]

In March 2008, the U.S. Ambassador to Moscow noted:

Defense and security experts note that NATO enlargement is one of the few security areas where there is almost complete consensus among Russian policymakers, experts and the informed population: they are strongly against NATO's enlargement eastward, particularly to Ukraine and Georgia. Aleksandr Belkin, Deputy Executive Director of the Council on Foreign and Defense Policy, said Ukraine was the "line of last resort." If Ukraine becomes a member of NATO, "Russia's encirclement will be complete." He said there was almost universal agreement among Russia's political elite that NATO's attempt to bring in Ukraine was an "unfriendly act." [6]

There are many more records of how NATO's expansion into Ukraine was perceived as a threat by policy makers in Russia. I would like to show you one more of them. The US ambassador from Moscow wrote in January 2009:

a panel of senior Russian security analysts told Representatives (...) that many Russians lacked trust in the U.S., which was perceived to be indifferent, or even hostile, to Russian interests. The analysts (...) painted a gloomy picture of bilateral relations that they blamed largely upon the U.S.'s failure to treat Russia as a partner. [7]

(...)

One of the Russian security experts raised the objection, that...

the U.S. pushing NATO enlargement without taking Russian security concerns into account, and complained that "nothing substantial" was done in the way of NATO-Russia cooperation (...). He advised that in a partnership, one partner should think about how the other "perceived things." [7]

(...)

Another Russian security expert commented, ...

the crux of Russia's poor opinion of the U.S. was Washington's penchant to lecture Moscow on governance. "We are building a democracy in our way and don't want foreign interference," he complained. The fact that the U.S. failed to live up to its own, "supposed high standards on human rights" in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Guantanamo, made this especially galling for Russians. He maintained that the war in Iraq played a large part in souring Putin on wanting to be a "member of the club" of forward-leaning countries by demonstrating that if a country had enough power it could do what it wanted and ignore international opinion. [7]

(...)

The analysts agreed that it appeared Ukraine and Georgia were being "pushed" by the U.S.

toward NATO membership. They offered as evidence the U.S. plan to get Ukraine and Georgia into the alliance without MAP after NATO members rejected extending it at the Bucharest summit. MAP stands for Membership Action Plan and is the precursor to full NATO membership. [7]

(...)

Another security expert said: *The U.S. pushing policies such as NATO membership for Ukraine only helped the "America haters come to power" in Russia.* [7]

4. Viewpoints from the German government

The position of Russian decision-makers and security experts is clear: they see the attempt to integrate Ukraine into the West and NATO as a provocation against Russia and destabilizing for Ukraine. Let us now see what position the German government under Angela Merkel has taken regarding Ukraine.

For this purpose, let us first look at a recording of the American ambassador in Berlin, written in June 2008, in which the American diplomat David Merkel discusses with the German diplomats Rolf Nickel and Norman Walter about a NATO membership of Ukraine or its preliminary stage, a Membership Action Plan, in short MAP.

Both Nickel and Walter raised concerns that if MAP were pushed forward too quickly in Ukraine, where public opinion is bitterly divided on the issue of NATO membership, it could prove destabilizing and "split" the country. [8]

(...)

The German diplomat Rolf Nickel emphasized, that ...
the geo-strategic context of a Georgian accession to NATO was quite different from that of Ukraine. While Georgia was "just a bug on the skin of the bear," Ukraine was inseparably identified with Russia, going back to Vladimir of Kiev in 988. [8]

(...)

Further he said ...
that Germany thought it was wrong to see MAP as a "tool" to facilitate democratic and military reforms in countries like Ukraine and Georgia, when it was really the last step to NATO membership. [8]

(...)

German diplomat Rolf Nickel then gives three reasons why Ukraine's NATO membership is too risky:

First, overall low public support for NATO membership, second, a deep divide between the eastern and western parts of the country on this question, and third a weak government with a small majority in the Rada [The Ukrainian parliament. Walter agreed and thought that MAP and the issue of NATO membership could "break up the country" if pushed forward too quickly. [8]

In the concluding commentary, the U.S. Ambassador writes:

We have our work cut out for us in convincing them to agree to MAP. [8]

The U.S. received support in its persuasion efforts from other NATO members. This can be seen, among other things, in a dispatch from June 2008:

On his subsequent trip to Europe May 27-29, Harper [the Canadian prime minister at that time] pressed his Italian, German, French, and British counterparts for the quick extension of MAP to Ukraine and Georgia, [Canadian senior official] Sinclair said. Canada's bottom-line is that MAP is "imperative for Ukraine...but Georgia too." [9]

That at the time the Chancellery and the Foreign Office defended their position on NATO expansion into Ukraine even in the face of strong pressure from abroad is evident from a June 2008 dispatch from the U.S. ambassador:

We will have to engage regularly with the German government at very senior levels over the next several months to have any hope of getting the Germans on board with extending MAP to Georgia and Ukraine at the NATO foreign ministers meeting in December. The German "nein" at Bucharest came from the Chancellor herself and she has shown little indication of flexibility on this point since then. While it is tempting to attribute Germany's position on MAP to a feckless concern for Russian sensitivities, Merkel and her senior advisers seem to have some genuine reservations about the Georgian and Ukrainian candidacies, which we should take seriously and attempt to address. [10]

(...)

Further it says:

Merkel has demonstrated that she is ready to withstand considerable pressure. Since the summit, she has shown little indication of backing down from her view that Georgia, because of a democratic deficit and separatist conflicts, and Ukraine, because of the uncertain public support for NATO membership, are simply not ready to join MAP and may not be for some time to come. It is also important to note that the Chancellor enjoys almost unanimous political support within Germany for this approach. [10]

(...)

The Chancellery and Foreign Office are concerned that granting MAP too soon, before there is a consensus in favor, could prove destabilizing and split the country between the pro-Russian east and the relatively more pro-NATO west. [10]

The dispatches reveal how the issue of Ukraine's alignment led to tensions between the U.S. and Russia years ago. Despite numerous warnings and fears that a continuation of the policy at that time could lead to instability and civil war in Ukraine and to a confrontation between the U.S. and Russia, there is unfortunately no evidence in any of the dispatches that efforts were made to abandon this confrontational course.

The original documents shown in this video are only available to us thanks to Julian Assange and WikiLeaks. Because of the publication of these documents, Julian Assange has been in pre-trial detention for almost four years now and is being held under the harshest prison conditions, at times even in solitary confinement, in a high-security prison in London. He is being held there because the U.S. is demanding his extradition and a prison sentence of 175 years for these publications. The U.S. indictment is based on the U.S. Espionage Act and is sharply criticized because it criminalizes Julian Assange's journalistic activities and because this is the first time in history that U.S. espionage law has been applied extraterritorially, i.e. outside the United States. This sets a precedent that can be applied in court against other journalists around the world in the future which will deter many from publishing original documents from U.S. agencies, intelligence services, and the military, even if those documents contain evidence of moral wrongdoing. Finally, a few closing words from Julian Assange himself. I thank you in advance for your attention and would be happy if you subscribe to us on Rumble, Telegram or Youtube and support our work with a donation.

Julian Assange: “All men by nature desire to know.“ Aristotle, when he wrote this, was saying that the thing that makes human beings different from other creatures, the thing that defines us, is the pursuit and acquisition of knowledge. This is not just to say that we, human beings, are curious creatures, it is to say that our ability to think about and to act on the world around us, is bound up with our ability to know it. To be alive as a human being is to know, in the same way as it is to have a heart that beats. We all understand this in mundane ways. We understand, for instance, that part of being a fully independent adult, making choices about life, is learning about the world around us, and informing our choices with that learning. In the book of proverbs it says: “By wisdom a house is built and through understanding it is established, through knowledge its rooms are filled with rare and beautiful treasures.” But there is something more to all of this. The very next saying in proverbs is: “The wise are mightier than the strong”. This is the earliest occurrence known to me, of the now well-known idea, knowledge is power. To keep a person ignorant is to place them in a cage. So it follows that the powerful, if they want to keep their power, will try to know as much about us as they can, and they’ll try to make sure that we know as little about them as is possible. I see this inside everywhere, both in religious writings, which promise emancipation from political repression and in the revolutionary works promising liberation from the repressive dogmas of the church and the state. The powerful throughout history have

understood this. The invention of the printing press was opposed by the old powers of Europe because it spelled the end of their control of knowledge and therefore the end of their tenure as power brokers. The protestant reformation was not just a religious movement but a political struggle: The fight to liberate hoarded knowledge through translation and dissemination. Through the confessional system the catholic church spied upon the lives of its congregates while Latin mass excluded most people, who could not speak Latin, from an understanding of the very system of thought that bound them. Knowledge has always flowed upwards, to bishops and kings, not down to serfs and slaves. The principal remains the same in the present era. Documents disclosed by NSA whistleblower Edward Snowden show that governments dare to aspire through their intelligence agencies to a godlike knowledge about each and everyone of us. But at the same time they hide their actions behind official secrecy. As our governments and corporations know more and more about us, we know less and less about them. The policy as always is to channel the decisive information upwards, never downwards. Today, remember that it is good to seek to empower the powerless through knowledge and to drag the machinations of the powerful into the daylight. We must be unapologetic about that most basic of humanities: The desire to know.

LIST OF SOURCES

[1] NYET MEANS NYET: RUSSIA'S NATO ENLARGEMENT REDLINES

https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/08MOSCOW265_a.html

[2] RUSSIAN ANALYST WARNS OF CONSEQUENCES IF UKRAINE JOINS NATO, SAYS RUSSIANS BELIEVE U.S. HAS HIDDEN AGENDA

https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/08MOSCOW1811_a.html

[3] EUR A/S FRIED'S SEPTEMBER 1 MEETINGS WITH SENIOR MFA AND PRESIDENCY OFFICIALS ON IMPROVING RELATIONS WITH EUROPE

https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/05PARIS6125_a.html

[4] INCORPORATING UKRAINE INTO U.S.-RUSSIA POLICY

https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09MOSCOW2412_a.html

[5] ACTING U/S FRIED'S MEETING WITH DFM KARASIN

https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/08MOSCOW748_a.html

[6] RUSSIA'S EXPECTATIONS FOR NATO SUMMIT DEPEND ON MAP FOR UKRAINE AND GEORGIA https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/08MOSCOW806_a.html

[7] RUSSIAN ANALYSTS COMPLAIN U.S. HAS BETRAYED RUSSIA'S TRUST

https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09MOSCOW2_a.html

[8] GERMANY/RUSSIA: CHANCELLERY VIEWS ON MAP FOR UKRAINE AND GEORGIA https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/08BERLIN749_a.html

[9] P/DAS VOLKER CONSULTS WITH CANADIANS ON NATO

https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/08OTTAWA773_a.html

[10] GETTING GERMANY ON BOARD FOR MAP FOR GEORGIA AND UKRAINE

https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/08BERLIN744_a.html

[11] CC BY-SA 2.0 Author Cancillería del Ecuador

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:RUEDA_DE_PRENSA_CONJUNTA_ENTRE_CANCILLER_RICARDO_PATI%C3%91O_Y_JULIAN_ASSANGE.jpg

Other interesting embassy dispatches

- IS MILITARY CONFLICT NO LONGER UNTHINKABLE?
https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09KYIV1740_a.html
- RUSSIA-UKRAINE - NATO AND HOLODOMOR
https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/08MOSCOW911_a.html
- PUTIN IN MUNICH: SHARP TONE, BUT FAMILIAR COMPLAINTS
https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/07MOSCOW613_a.html
- TFGG01: RUSSIA DEFIANT
https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/08MOSCOW2414_a.html
- HUMAN RIGHTS OMBUDSMAN LUKIN ON RECOGNITION, RUSSIAN INTERESTS, NEED FOR U.S. DIALOGUE
https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/08MOSCOW2586_a.html
- EUR DAS MERKEL,S JULY 1 MEETING WITH UKRAINE FOREIGN MINISTER OGRYZKO
https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/08STATE83017_a.html

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