WikiLeaks cable exposes NATO war plan against Russia

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US State Department cables released by WikiLeaks have unveiled secret NATO plans for a US-led war against Russia over the Baltic states.

The cables, first reported by the *Guardian* newspaper Tuesday and posted on the WikiLeaks site, underscore the growing geo-strategic tensions between the US and Russia even as the Obama administration has emphasized a "reset" in relations that was supposed to overcome the conflicts left over from the Bush administration.

The secret plans spell out preparations for a full-scale war with Russia that would see the immediate deployment of nine divisions of US, British, German and Polish troops in the event of any Russian incursion into the former Soviet Baltic republics.

The plans also specify German and Polish ports that would be used to receive naval assault units and US and British warships destined for battle with Russian forces.

Despite these details, there is no indication in the cables of the potentially catastrophic implications of such an armed clash between the world's two largest nuclear powers.

While some analysts in Moscow insisted that Russian intelligence was well aware of the contingency plans, their public exposure by WikiLeaks prompted statements of protest by Russian officials and demands for an explanation from NATO.

The contingency plans that would send US troops into combat against Russian forces were developed in the wake of the Russian-Georgian clash of August 2008 that followed Georgia's unsuccessful attempt to overrun the breakaway territory of South Ossetia.

As the cables spell out, the governments of Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania, which were brought into the NATO alliance in 2004, began to lobby US officials for the development of a NATO strategy for the defense of their territories against a Russian attack.

The US embassy in Latvia began by informing Washington about the concerns of the government in Riga even as the fighting was going on in South Ossetia. An August 15, 2008 message cited discussions with Latvian leaders who expressed the sentiment that "this could easily be them" and reported "Latvians are beginning to worry if membership in (NATO) provides them the assurances of their security that they had hoped for."

The documents, marked secret and classified, trace the evolution of US policy from these first demands by the Baltic states in the wake of the Russian-Georgian conflict through to the actual elaboration of a contingency plan for a military confrontation with Russia that was secretly adopted in January 2010.

The cables indicate that US officials were anxious not to publicly antagonize Moscow, even as they sought to put into place the war plans demanded by the Baltic states. A report classified as secret from the US ambassador to NATO, recounting a meeting with the three Baltic state ambassadors, asserts, "We are not returning to the cold war."

NATO and Russia had established formal relations in 1997 based on an agreement that explicitly stated, "NATO and Russia do not consider each other as adversaries." The problem confronting US officials was how to draft a policy that clearly cast Russia as an enemy without upending ties with Moscow.

In a cable drafted in October 2009, US Ambassador to NATO Ivo Daalder spelled out the problem. "Leaders in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania are pressing hard for NATO Article 5 (which compels all NATO states to come to the defense of any other member state under attack) contingency planning for the Baltic states," he began, noting that President Barack Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton had already stated their support for such plans.

The problem, Daalder pointed out, was that such plans "would require specifying Russia as a potential threat," something which Germany and other NATO member states opposed. He wrote: "As we saw during the debates over the Russia-Georgia war, many Allies will take great pains to avoid even the suggestion that the Alliance and Russia are on a course toward a new Cold War."

He suggested that Washington could get around the evident contradiction by expanding an existing contingency plan for the defense of Poland to include the Baltic states or by adopting "generic plans" for a NATO response to aggression that would not name the states involved but would be applicable to the Baltic countries.

Among the concerns expressed by Daalder was that in the absence of a contingency plan, the Baltic states would not trust NATO for their defense and "will have to consider developing a force structure focused on territorial defense rather than on expeditionary capabilities." The specific "expeditionary" role that the US ambassador had in mind was the deployment of Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian troops in the US-led war in Afghanistan.

The cable indicates that it was Germany that first raised the suggestion that the contingency plan for Poland—codenamed "Eagle Guardian"—could be widened to include the Baltic states. This was the path that Washington ultimately backed. NATO

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approved the plan on January 22, 2010 but made no public announcement.

A January 26 cable signed by Hillary Clinton from the State Department to US diplomats in NATO countries and to the American embassy in Moscow spelled out the need to maintain strict secrecy in relation to the agreement.

"The United States believes strongly that such planning should not be discussed publicly. These military plans are classified at the NATO SECRET level," the cable states. "Public discussion of contingency plans undermines their military value, giving insight into NATO's planning processes. This weakens the security of all Allies."

The document adds: "A public discussion of contingency planning would also likely lead to an unnecessary increase in NATO-Russia tensions, something we should try to avoid as we work to improve practical cooperation in areas of common NATO-Russia interest."

The cable concludes with recommendations for dealing with any media inquiries on the contingency plans. Such non-answers as "NATO does not discuss specific plans" and "NATO is constantly reviewing and revising its plans" are suggested. The diplomats are instructed to stress that NATO planning "is not 'aimed' at any other country," which in this case it most definitely was—at Russia.

Russia's ambassador to NATO said Tuesday that Moscow would demand that the Western alliance abrogate the Baltic contingency plan, saying that the plan stood in direct contradiction to assurances given at the recent NATO summit in Lisbon.

"We must get some assurances that such plans will be dropped, and that Russia is not an enemy for NATO," said the Russian envoy, Dmitry Rogozin. "I expect my colleagues from the NATO-Russia Council to confirm that Lisbon has made all the difference."

Rogozin dismissed NATO's claims that the contingency plan was not aimed at any one country. "Against whom else could such a defense be intended?" he asked. "Against Sweden, Finland, Greenland, Iceland, against polar bears, or against the Russian bear?"

Meanwhile, the *Guardian* quoted an unnamed official at the Russian foreign ministry as saying that the documents had provoked "a lot of questions and bewilderment."

"Russia has repeatedly raised the question about the need to ensure that there is no military planning aimed against one another," the source said.

The revelations have surfaced under conditions of mounting tensions between Washington and Moscow over the US Senate's failure to ratify a new START treaty on nuclear arms reduction and differences over Washington's drive to set up an anti-missile network in Europe.

Cooperation between Moscow and Washington notwithstanding, the US war in Afghanistan and the strategic drive by US imperialism to assert its hegemony in Central Asia are an inevitable source of conflict.

Underscoring these growing tensions, the Russian navy reported Wednesday that US and Japanese forces suspended war games in the Sea of Japan after two Russian Ilyushin-38 anti-submarine aircraft flew over the area.

"The area is our zone of responsibility," said Roman Markov, a spokesman for the Russian navy. "The airplanes carried out a planned flight in an area of the Russian Pacific Fleet's regular activity. Our pilots did not violate any rules of international air space."

The military exercise involves some 34,000 Japanese and more than 10,000 US military personnel along with scores of warships and hundreds of aircraft. They were suspended out of concern that the Russian aircraft could gather secret data on US and Japanese capabilities.

Relations between Moscow and Tokyo have soured in recent weeks over the dispute between the two governments over the control of a string of islands stretching south of Russia's Kamchatka peninsula. Known in Russia as the Southern Kuriles and in Japan as the Northern Territories, they were seized by Soviet forces in World War II.

Last month, Russia's President Dmitry Medvedev made a brief surprise trip to one of the islands, provoking angry protests from Japan. Last weekend, in an apparent response, Japan's Foreign Minister Seiji Maehara flew past the islands on a Japanese coast guard plane. An unnamed Russian official responded to the fly-by: "No one, Japan included, is banned from admiring the beauties of Russian nature."

Other dispatches released by WikiLeaks point to the tensions within the NATO alliance over relations with Russia. In particular, a February 2010 cable from the US embassy in Paris records a clash between US Secretary of State Robert Gates and France's Foreign Minister Herve Morin over French plans for arms sales to Moscow.

Gates, the cable reports, "raised US concerns over sales of a Mistral-class helicopter carrier to Russia as sending a mixed signal to both Russia and our Central and Eastern European allies." The Pentagon chief went on to recall that while French President Nicolas Sarkozy had negotiated the ceasefire agreement that ended the fighting between Russia and Georgia in 2008, Moscow had not lived up to the agreement.

Morin replied, according to the cable, by asking "rhetorically how we can tell Russia we desire a partnership but then not trust them."

The cable also quotes Morin expressing the view that "a European Missile Defense system is both unwise and unnecessary," adding that Gates "refuted Morin's contention."

An appended note indicating back-channel discussions between US and French officials states: "Following the meetings, Morin's critical comments on Missile Defense were disavowed by senior officials at the MoD and the MFA, who said that his views were his own and that the U.S. should essentially 'erase' what he had just said."

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