

MEMORANDUM FOR: Angela Merkel, Chancellor of Germany

FROM: Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS)

SUBJECT: Ukraine and NATO

We the undersigned are long-time veterans of U.S. intelligence. We take the unusual step of writing this open letter to you to ensure that you have an opportunity to be briefed on our views prior to the NATO summit on September 4-5.

You need to know, for example, that accusations of a major Russian "invasion" of Ukraine appear not to be supported by reliable intelligence. Rather, the "intelligence" seems to be of the same dubious, politically "fixed" kind used 12 years ago to "justify" the U.S.-led attack on Iraq. We saw no credible evidence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq then; we see no credible evidence of a Russian invasion now. Twelve years ago, former Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder, mindful of the flimsiness of the evidence on Iraqi WMD, refused to join in the attack on Iraq. In our view, you should be appropriately suspicious of charges made by the U.S. State Department and NATO officials alleging a Russian invasion of Ukraine.

President Barack Obama tried yesterday to cool the rhetoric of his own senior diplomats and the corporate media, when he publicly described recent activity in the Ukraine, as "a continuation of what's been taking place for months now ... it's not really a shift."

Obama, however, has only tenuous control over the policymakers in his administration -- who, sadly, lack much sense of history, know little of war, and substitute anti-Russian invective for a policy. One year ago, hawkish State Department officials and their friends in the media very nearly got Mr. Obama to launch a major attack on Syria based, once again, on "intelligence" that was dubious, at best.

Largely because of the growing prominence of, and apparent reliance on, intelligence we believe to be spurious, we think the possibility of hostilities escalating beyond the borders of Ukraine has increased significantly over the past several days. More important, we believe that this likelihood can be avoided, depending on the degree of judicious skepticism you and other European leaders bring to the NATO summit next week.

#### Experience With Untruth

Hopefully, your advisers have reminded you of NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen's checkered record for credibility. It appears to us that Rasmussen's speeches continue to be drafted by Washington. This was abundantly clear on the day before the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq when, as Danish Prime Minister, he told his Parliament: "Iraq has weapons of mass destruction. This is not something we just believe. We know."

Photos can be worth a thousand words; they can also deceive. We have considerable experience collecting, analyzing, and reporting on all kinds of satellite and other imagery, as well as other kinds of intelligence. Suffice it to say that the images released by NATO on August 28 provide a very flimsy basis on which to charge Russia with invading Ukraine. Sadly, they bear a strong resemblance to the images shown by Colin Powell at the UN on February 5, 2003 that, likewise, proved nothing.

That same day, we warned President Bush that our former colleague analysts were "increasingly distressed at the politicization of intelligence" and told him flatly, "Powell's presentation does not come close" to justifying war. We urged Mr. Bush to "widen the discussion ... beyond the circle of those advisers clearly bent on a war for which we see no compelling reason and from which we believe the unintended consequences are likely to be catastrophic."

Consider Iraq today. Worse than catastrophic. Although President Vladimir Putin has until now showed considerable reserve on the conflict in the Ukraine, it behooves us to remember that Russia, too, can "shock and awe." In our view, if there is the slightest chance of that kind of thing eventually happening to Europe because of Ukraine, sober-minded leaders need to think this through very carefully.

If the photos that NATO and the U.S. have released represent the best available "proof" of an invasion from Russia, our suspicions increase that a major effort is under way to fortify arguments for the NATO summit to approve actions that Russia is sure to regard as provocative. Caveat emptor is an expression with which you are no doubt familiar. Suffice it to add that one should be very cautious regarding what Mr. Rasmussen, or even Secretary of State John Kerry, are peddling.

We trust that your advisers have kept you informed regarding the crisis in Ukraine from the beginning of 2014, and how the possibility that Ukraine would become a member of NATO is anathema to the Kremlin. According to a February 1, 2008 cable (published by WikiLeaks) from the U.S. embassy in Moscow to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, U.S. Ambassador William Burns was called in by Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, who explained Russia's strong opposition to NATO membership for Ukraine.

Lavrov warned pointedly of "fears that the issue could potentially split the country in two, leading to violence or even, some claim, civil war, which would force Russia to decide whether to intervene." Burns gave his cable the unusual title, "NYET MEANS NYET: RUSSIA'S NATO ENLARGEMENT REDLINES," and sent it off to Washington with IMMEDIATE precedence. Two months later, at their summit in Bucharest NATO leaders issued a formal declaration that "Georgia and Ukraine will be in NATO."

Just yesterday, Ukrainian Prime Minister Arseny Yatsenyuk used his Facebook page to claim that, with the approval of Parliament that he has requested, the path to NATO membership is open. Yatsenyuk, of course, was Washington's favorite pick to become prime minister after the February 22 coup d'etat in Kiev. "Yats is the guy," said Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland a few weeks before the coup, in an intercepted telephone conversation with U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine Geoffrey Pyatt. You may recall that this is the same conversation in which Nuland said, "f\*ck the EU."

## Timing of the Russian "Invasion"

The conventional wisdom promoted by Kiev just a few weeks ago was that Ukrainian forces had the upper hand in fighting the anti-coup federalists in southeastern Ukraine, in what was largely portrayed as a mop-up operation. But that picture of the offensive originated almost solely from official government sources in Kiev. There were very few reports coming from the ground in southeastern Ukraine. There was one, however, quoting Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko, that raised doubt about the reliability of the government's portrayal.

According to the "press service of the President of Ukraine" on August 18, Poroshenko called for a "regrouping of Ukrainian military units involved in the operation of power in the East of the country. ... Today we need to do the rearrangement of forces that will defend our territory and continued army offensives," said Poroshenko, adding, "we need to consider a new military operation in the new circumstances."

If the "new circumstances" meant successful advances by Ukrainian government forces, why would it be necessary to "regroup," to "rearrange" the forces? At about this time, sources on the ground began to report a string of successful attacks by the anti-coup federalists against government forces. According to these sources, it was the government army that was starting to take heavy casualties and lose ground, largely because of ineptitude and poor leadership.

Ten days later, as they became encircled and/or retreated, a ready-made excuse for this was to be found in the "Russian invasion." That is precisely when the fuzzy photos were released by NATO and reporters like the New York Times' Michael Gordon were set loose to spread the word that "the Russians are coming." (Michael Gordon was one of the most egregious propagandists promoting the war on Iraq.)

## No Invasion -- But Plenty Other Russian Support

The anti-coup federalists in southeastern Ukraine enjoy considerable local support, partly as a result of government artillery strikes on major population centers. And we believe that Russian support probably has been pouring across the border and includes, significantly, excellent battlefield intelligence. But it is far from clear that this support includes tanks and artillery at this point -- mostly because the federalists have been better led and surprisingly successful in pinning down government forces.

At the same time, we have little doubt that, if and when the federalists need them, the Russian tanks will come.

This is precisely why the situation demands a concerted effort for a ceasefire, which you know Kiev has so far been delaying. What is to be done at this point? In our view, Poroshenko and Yatsenyuk need to be told flat-out that membership in NATO is not in the cards -- and that NATO has no intention of waging a proxy war with Russia -- and especially not in support of the rag-tag army of Ukraine. Other members of NATO need to be told the same thing.

For the Steering Group, Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity

William Binney, former Technical Director, World Geopolitical & Military Analysis, NSA; co-founder, SIGINT Automation Research Center (ret.)

Larry Johnson, CIA & State Department (ret.)

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