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## This Leaked Diplomatic Cable From 2008 Foreshadowed Russia's Invasion Of Ukraine

Paul Szoldra May 14, 2014, 2:04 AM



**Armed men, believed to be Russian soldiers, stand guard outside a Ukrainian military base in Simferopol March 19, 2014. Defying Ukrainian protests and Western sanctions, Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a treaty in Moscow on Tuesday making Crimea part of Russia again, but said he did not plan to seize any other regions of Ukraine.** REUTERS/Thomas Peter

(and tweeted by Wikileaks on Tuesday) foreshadowed much of the tension between Russia

Detailing the possibility of admitting Ukraine into NATO on Feb. 1, 2008, then-U.S. Ambassador William Burns wrote that such a move would touch "a raw nerve" with Russia that would engender "serious concerns about the consequences of stability in the region."

"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, which would force Russia to decide whether to intervene," the cable read.

Massive protests swept Ukraine in early February, resulting in the replacement of pro-Russian President Viktor Yanukovich with a government more closely-aligned with western interests. Not long after, Russian troops intervened, seizing key government buildings in Ukraine's Crimea, which Russia later annexed.

On Sunday, the eastern Ukraine cities of Donetsk and Luhansk voted to break away to form independent states, moving the country dangerously close to civil war, [The Washington Post reports](#).

The 2008 cable is remarkably prescient, detailing complex factors, such as the split between ethnic-Russians against Ukraine joining NATO, and Russia being pushed to possibly intervene to avoid a perception of U.S.-E.U. "encirclement" with its regional influence being undermined.

"It is also politically popular to paint the U.S. and NATO as Russia's adversaries and to use NATO's outreach to Ukraine and Georgia as a means of generating support from Russian nationalists," the cable reads. "While Russian opposition to the first round of NATO enlargement in the mid-1990's was strong, Russia now feels itself able to respond more forcefully to what it perceives as actions contrary to its national interests."

More recently, a Kremlin official reiterated this stance to the U.S. during the protests in February — accusing it of arming the rebels in what he called an attempted coup — [telling Reuters](#) that "interference" in Ukraine was a breach of a 1994 treaty between the U.S. and Russia.