

Identifier	Created	Classification	Origin
09KYIV1728	2009-10-05 16:14:00	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Kyiv

Cable title: **ASD VERSHBOW IN KYIV: UKRAINIANS CONCERNED ABOUT**

Tags: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MARR](#) [UP](#)

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CONFIDENTIAL KYIV 001728

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/05/2019

TAGS: PREL PGOV MARR UP

SUBJECT: ASD VERSHBOW IN KYIV: UKRAINIANS CONCERNED ABOUT
RUSSIAN THREAT; CALM ON MISSILE DEFENSE

Classified By: Political Counselor Colin Cleary, reasons 1.4 b/d

1. (C) SUMMARY: Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, Ambassador Alexander Vershbow, led the U.S. delegation to the U.S.-Ukraine Bilateral Defense Consultations (BDC) in Kyiv September 28-29. In a series of bilateral meetings and engagements with media and academic experts, ASD Vershbow heard repeated Ukrainian concerns about the threat from Russia, a Ukrainian security vacuum, and Ukraine's desire for a security guarantee from the United States. Ukrainian leaders reiterated requests for visible U.S. engagement, and pressed for a higher-level inauguration of the Ukraine-U.S. Commission this fall. Ukrainian leaders and defense experts reacted calmly to explanations of the Administration's approach on missile defense, and were reassured that it did not represent any reduced commitment to Central and Eastern Europe. END SUMMARY.

Acting Defense Minister Ivashchenko

2. (SBU) Meeting with Ukrainian Acting Minister of Defense Valeriy Ivashchenko on September 28, ASD Vershbow reaffirmed the Administration's message of support for Ukraine, underscored Ukraine's importance as a strategic partner, and commended the defense relationship, highlighting Ukraine's contributions to NATO and coalition operations in Iraq, Afghanistan and Kosovo. ASD Vershbow stressed the need for Ukraine to stay on track with defense reform efforts, and expressed disappointment with cancellation of the Sea Breeze and Rapid Trident exercises due to the Rada's inability to pass the foreign exercises bill, as well as the last-minute cancellation of Chief of Defense (CHOD) General Kyrychenko's planned visit to the United States in mid-September. Vershbow explained that the new U.S. European missile defense plan would be more effective than the previous approach and continue to include sites in Central and Eastern Europe.

3. (SBU) Ivaschenko reaffirmed Ukraine's desire to integrate into Euro-Atlantic structures and institutions, and he



stressed the importance of U.S. support for Ukraine's NATO aspirations. He said that Russia's attempts to dominate the post-Soviet space and the fact that Ukraine had been left out of a collective security system were reasons why Ukraine required that the security assurance provided in the 1994 Budapest Memorandum become legally binding. He underscored the MoD's commitment to make the Ukrainian armed forces interoperable with NATO. Acting Minister Ivashchenko hoped for further bilateral cooperation, and lamented cancellation of the exercises. Regarding the CHOD visit, he said the visit had not been cancelled; the dates had just been postponed because of pressing business at home.

 Kyrychenko: Lamenting defense budget cuts

4. (C) ASD Vershbow met later in the day with the Ukrainian Chief of Defense, who presented a grim picture of Ukraine's defense programs. A reduced budget allocating only five million dollars for force modernization has left few resources available for training or exercises. Kyrychenko said that he had briefed Prime Minister Tymoshenko on MoD budget woes and that his staff had prepared another brief for an upcoming Parliamentary hearing, but he did not appear optimistic. Perhaps surprisingly, he also said that the MoD is considering bolstering participation not only in Active Endeavor but also in Afghanistan, where, he suggested, Ukraine might help to train the Afghan National Army.

5.(C) ASD Vershbow observed that in light of MoD budget constraints, bilateral and NATO exercises offered a particularly important training opportunity for the Ukrainian military. At the suggestion of USEMB Kyiv, he noted that steps such as enhanced MoD English language training and the selection of a progressive president of Ukraine's National Defense University would further strengthen U.S. efforts to assist Ukrainian MoD reforms. Vershbow registered regret at the cancellation of Kyrychenko's visit, recognizing that responsibility lay with Ukraine's political, rather than military, leadership.

 Bohatyrova: Alarms About Russia, Security Vacuum

6. (C) National Security and Defense Council (NSDC) Secretary Raisa Bohatyrova, joined by former Foreign Minister Ohryzko,

stressed to ASD Vershbow September 29 that Ukraine finds itself in a security vacuum and is "insecure in its borders." With Ukraine under intense pressure from Russia, any appearance of U.S. disengagement from the region will embolden Russia further. Bohatyrova underlined that Russia is directly interfering in Ukraine's internal political affairs. This is evident not only in Medvedev's August letter but in Russian government support for pro-separatist NGOs in Crimea and elsewhere. She also said (contrary to all polls) that President Yushchenko has a good chance to be reelected. Referring to recently published analysis by former National Security Advisor Horbulin, Bohatyrova said she believes Russian intelligence has devised plans for the dismemberment of Ukraine.

7. (C) Bohatyrova argued that as a result of the security vacuum, Ukraine needs a legally binding bilateral security guarantee from the United States. She said that improved U.S.-Russian relations, but not at the expense of Ukraine's security. The GOU is concerned that the U.S. is "forgetting" about Ukraine. Ukraine could pass

"the point of no return" and fall into the Russian sphere.

8. (C) ASD Vershbow stressed, as he did at all meetings during this visit, that he was in Ukraine to underline the themes which Vice President Biden outlined in his July speech in Kyiv: no spheres of influence and strong support for the right of all states to seek the security alliance of their own choosing. ASD Vershbow underlined that the Administration's missile defense decision was in no way an abandonment of missile defense or of Central and Eastern Europe; it was a more robust system that would defend all of NATO and would likely include elements in Poland and other CEE countries. Ukraine has the Administration's full attention, Vershbow stressed. He lamented that Ukraine had undermined mil-to-mil cooperation, noting the Rada's inability to approve foreign exercises, such as Sea Breeze, and the low defense budget. He stressed that the U.S. remains fully committed to Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty.

9. (C) On security guarantees, ASD Vershbow said that the U.S. regarded the 1994 Budapest memorandum to be still in effect, regardless of the expiration of START in December. We expect Russia to abide by the assurances in the memorandum, as he had stated publicly that afternoon in a speech to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Diplomatic Academy. Russia is legally bound to respect Ukraine's territorial integrity through a number of agreements as well. While such documents are important, just as important is building up Ukraine's own strength and thickening Ukraine's ties with the U.S. and other Western countries, so as to establish "facts on the ground." That is why enhancing our military and security cooperation in concrete ways is critical. In addition, the Budapest memorandum and the NATO-Ukraine Charter contained provisions for consultation in times of crisis. Responding, Former FM Ohryzko asked, rhetorically, whether such consultations would matter if Russian forces were to take over Crimea. He noted that Russia had violated its commitments in attacking Georgia and had not been punished for this.

10. (C) Bohatyrova appealed for high-level U.S. engagement with Ukraine. She reiterated Ukraine's invitation for Secretary Clinton to visit. Senior visits would demonstrate U.S. commitment and Russia would notice. She lamented that there was still no agreement on the structure and level of the U.S.-Ukraine Strategic Partnership Commission. A lower-level meeting would send the wrong signal, as did the delay in the announcement of the next U.S. Ambassador. (In a dinner with Acting Foreign Minister Khandogiy and a lunch with Ukrainian Ambassador to Russia Hryshchenko, Vershbow heard similar appeals for raising the level of the SPC to the Foreign Minister level, if only in name. Hryshchenko, who is also Deputy NSDC Secretary, said he would rather postpone the first SPC meeting than hold it at the Assistant Secretary/Deputy FM level.)

Horbulin: Russia Threat

11. (C) ASD Vershbow met September 28 with Volodymyr Horbulin, Director of the Institute of National Security Issues and formerly National Security Advisor to President Kuchma. On missile defense, ASD Vershbow emphasized that the Administration's decision constituted neither a concession to

Russia nor U.S. disengagement from Central Europe. Rather, the new U.S. approach will mean a more effective system that will be operational sooner, and it will incorporate new

sensor technology that makes unnecessary the radar originally slated for the Czech Republic. It could still have important elements located in Poland, if the Poles agree. At the same time, the system posed no threat to Russia and could serve as the basis for cooperation with Moscow.

12. (C) Horbulin noted the political risk that the Polish and Czech governments had taken by supporting deployment on their territory, adding that the rollout of the U.S. decision was politically damaging to the GOP and GOCR even if it did not leave the Central Europeans any weaker militarily. He argued that a Patriot-3 deployment to Poland would soften the political blow, adding that Ukrainian early-warning radar sites (Sevastopol and Mukachevo) could be modernized and plugged into a comprehensive European missile-defense system. ASD Vershbow indicated that there might be opportunities for Ukraine to participate in MD architecture; Horbulin replied that if so, it would be the most substantive step in the history of U.S.-NATO-Ukraine cooperation. Vershbow undertook to raise Horbulin's radar idea with the Missile Defense Agency.

13. (C) Vershbow underscored U.S. disappointment with the cancellation of Sea Breeze and other exercises, the last-minute cancellation of the Ukrainian CHOD's planned visit to the U.S. in mid-September, and the cutting of the Ukrainian defense budget to "dangerous levels." Horbulin blamed the cancellation of Sea Breeze on the presidential election campaign; with 70 percent of Ukrainians currently opposed to NATO membership, the Rada could not demonstrate the "political wisdom" to approve the exercise. The country's financial difficulties were only a pretext, he said, adding that this situation is, indeed, only temporary. He did not know the reason for canceling the CHOD's visit. Ukraine's larger problem regarding security, he concluded, is the lack of political consensus and the imbalance between the branches of government.

14. (C) Asked what to expect in the near term from Russia regarding the Crimea and the Black Sea Fleet, Horbulin asserted that no conceivable Ukrainian parliament would ratify an amendment to the constitution that would allow the basing of the Russian Black Sea Fleet to continue beyond

2017. Whoever becomes the next Ukrainian president in 2010, this issue will be at the top of the agenda, and will loom still larger for the president elected in 2015. Although the Black Sea Fleet has lost its strategic importance, it nevertheless retains great significance for Russia's ability to influence Ukraine, asserted Horbulin.

15. (C) The situation is complicated by (a) the 30,000 people in Sevastopol whose livelihoods depend on the presence of the Russian Black Sea Fleet; (b) the large number of Soviet-era naval retirees who live in the Crimea; and (c) the demands of the 300,000-strong Crimean Tatar community for land and restitution, demands opposed by the Russian-speaking majority. Tensions are likely to intensify around 2012, as the policies of the new Ukrainian president, as well as Russian plans (or lack thereof) for relocation, become clear. Vershbow observed that the Russians appear to be doing little to plan for relocation, and apparently hope they will be able to stay in Sevastopol indefinitely. He added that the U.S. would like to work with Ukraine to create economic opportunities for Crimea and especially Sevastopol, as a way of demonstrating to the people that the peninsula has a brighter future with Ukraine than with Russia.

16. (C) ASD Vershbow emphasized that there is no loss of

interest in Ukraine on the part of the new U.S. administration; in fact, we hope to raise the profile of our strategic dialogue by convening the first meeting of our Strategic Partnership Commission in late October or early November. Horbulin expressed appreciation for this effort, recalling the utility of the Gore-Kuchma Commission on which he had worked so intensively during the 1990s. He added that it would be helpful to get a new U.S. ambassador to Kyiv before the new Russian Ambassador arrives.

Tarasyuk: Operationalize Budapest consultations provision

17. (C) Calling on two-time Foreign Minister, prominent Orange Revolution leader, and Head of the Rada Committee on European Integration Boris Tarasyuk, ASD Vershbow heard his views on EU-Ukraine relations, security assurances, defense policy, and Georgia. Tarasyuk frankly assessed that ongoing

negotiations on an EU Association Agreement would end late in 2010, noting that successful conclusion of a free trade agreement is a prerequisite. He admitted that, while a membership perspective for Ukraine is not entirely off the table, internal developments in Ukraine are not helping Ukraine's case with Europe. Tarasyuk criticized what he called a lack of common strategic vision in Brussels and a distaste for geopolitics, which he said leaves the EU vulnerable to Russian tactics and self-serving policies in capitals.

18. (C) Tarasyuk opined that Budapest Memorandum Article 6 provisions for consultation ought to have been invoked in the past, including for the economic intimidation inherent in recent natural "gas wars" between Russia and Ukraine. The ASD responded that, while the Memorandum does not stipulate a procedural mechanism to initiate such consultations, this idea was a reasonable one.

19 (C) Tarasyuk criticized Washington's and Europe's reaction to the Georgia-Russia war in 2008, in particular for the cease-fire's failure to reiterate support for Georgia's territorial integrity, and more generally for leaving the door open to possible aggressive Russian behavior. Vershbow underscored that U.S. and international support for Georgian territorial integrity has been reiterated strongly on every possible occasion, and most recently at the UN. The ASD noted that preventive actions will be the best way to deny Russia any new opportunities for intimidation or aggression.

Hrytsenko: Lack of Leadership in Kyiv

20. (C) In a meeting with ASD Vershbow September 28, Rada Defense Committee Chair, Former Defense Minister and (long-shot) Presidential candidate Anatolii Hrytsenko appeared only minimally interested in details of the new U.S. missile defense plan. After quick questions about timelines, components and their capabilities, Hrytsenko criticized the handling of missile strategy in Central Europe, claiming that a lack of transparency ultimately led to confusion about the United States' true intentions. As a result, he said, the strategy was doomed to fail, and the fact that the ASD needed to spend time explaining the current U.S. strategy was evidence of these shortcomings.

21. (C) Hrytsenko then went on to express strong negative opinions about Ukraine's short-term prospects of joining

either NATO or the EU, declaring that the Ukrainian people want domestic issues to be resolved before the commitment of resources, time and money to foreign policy issues. He predicted that Ukraine would not be prepared to address these issues until after the presidential elections. Only a strong president -- namely, himself -- would be capable of effecting sufficient change in the military to inspire Ukrainians' confidence in their leaders and the stability needed on the home front to pursue NATO and EU integration.

Media, think tank, and academic engagement

22. (C) U.S. Embassy Kyiv organized a roundtable including participants with a range of perspectives, including Leonid Kozhara, a member of the Parliamentary Committee on Foreign Affairs for the Party of Regions, Oleh Kokoshynsky of the Atlantic Council of Ukraine, Mykola Sunguroskyi of the Razumkov Center, and Oleksandr Sushko of the Euro-Atlantic Cooperation Institute. Kozhara emphasized that Kyiv needed to repair its relationship with Moscow, further noting that if the NATO mission was the war on terror, Ukraine was uninterested in attracting potential terrorist attacks. Other participants engaged with ASD Vershbow on strategies for navigating Ukraine's regional security concerns, including one proposal for the establishment of an international maritime base for counter-piracy in Sevastopol following the 2017 exit of Russia's Black Sea Fleet.

23. (C) A widely-publicized address at Ukraine's Diplomatic Academy and interviews with two media outlets -- Ukrainska Pravda and the television station Inter -- afforded opportunities to clarify U.S. missile defense plans and underscore the U.S. commitment to Ukraine's security, independence, and territorial integrity. Questions focused on Ukraine's prospects for NATO accession, U.S. reactions to the EU's Tagliavani report on the Russia-Georgia war, the likelihood of a bilateral security guarantee from the United

States, and implications of the recent U.S. "Russia reset" policy. Responding, ASD Vershbow emphasized the NATO declaration at Bucharest and U.S. position that there are multiple paths to NATO entry. He declined to comment on the (at that time, unreleased) EU report, but called for Russian compliance with the Medvedev-Sarkozy agreement, reiterated the U.S. expectation that all signatories adhere to Articles 1 and 2 of 1994 Budapest Memorandum, and confirmed that any "reset" with Russia will not come at the expense of U.S. friends, allies and partners in the region.

24. (U) ASD Vershbow has cleared this cable.
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