



Seymour Hersh: 'Something Else Is Cooking' In Ukraine

Description

Authored by Seymour Hersh, via Scheerpost,

This story is a follow up to Seymour Hersh's original report on the Nord Stream pipeline sabotage.

Last Saturday the *Washington Post* published an exposé of classified American intelligence documents showing that Ukrainian President Volodymyr **Zelensky, working behind the back of the Biden White House, pushed hard earlier this year for an expanded series of missile attacks inside Russia.** The documents were part of a large cache of classified materials posted online by an Air Force enlisted man now in custody. A senior official of the Biden administration, asked by the *Post* for comment on the newly revealed intelligence, said that Zelensky has never violated his pledge never to use American weapons to strike inside Russia. In the view of the White House, Zelensky can do no wrong.

Zelensky's desire to take the war to Russia may not be clear to the president and senior foreign policy aides in the White House, but it is to those in the American intelligence community who have found it difficult to get their intelligence and their assessments a hearing in the Oval Office. Meanwhile, the slaughter in the city of Bakhmut continues. It is similar in idiocy, if not in numbers, to the slaughter in Verdun and the Somme during World War I. The men in charge of today's war—in Moscow, Kiev, and Washington—have shown no interest even in temporary ceasefire talks that could serve as a prelude to something permanent. The talk now is only about the possibilities of a late spring or summer offensive by either party.

But something else is cooking, as some in the American intelligence community know and have reported in secret, at the instigation of government officials at various levels in Poland, Hungary, Lithuania, Estonia, Czechoslovakia, and Latvia. These countries are all allies of Ukraine and declared enemies of Vladimir Putin.

This group is led by Poland, whose leadership no longer fears the Russian army because its performance in Ukraine has left the glow of its success at Stalingrad during the Second World War in tatters. **It has been quietly urging Zelensky to find a way to end the war—even by resigning himself, if necessary—and to allow the process of rebuilding his nation to get under way. Zelensky is not budging, according to intercepts and other data known inside the Central Intelligence Agency, but he is beginning to lose the private support of his neighbors.**



One of the driving forces for the quiet European talks with Zelensky has been the more than five million Ukrainians fleeing from the war who have crossed the country's borders and have registered with its neighbors under an EU agreement for temporary protection that includes residency rights, access to the labor market, housing, social welfare assistance, and medical care. An assessment published by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees reports that the estimate excludes roughly 3 million Ukrainian refugees who escaped from the war zone without a visa into any of the 27 European nations that have abolished border control between each other under the Schengen agreement. Ukraine, though not in the EU, now enjoys all the benefits of the Schengen pact. A few nations, exhausted by the 15-month war, have reintroduced some forms of border control, but the regional refugee crisis will not be resolved until there is a formal peace agreement.

The UNHRC reports that free travel from Ukraine into the Baltic states and EU states in Western Europe “makes it particularly difficult to determine exactly how many Ukrainians have reached the EU in the last few months, and where they are now.” The report says the “vast majority” of the Ukrainian refugees are women and children, and one third of them are under the age of eighteen. Seventy-three per cent of the refugees of working age are women, many with children.

A February analysis of the European refugee issue by the Council on Foreign Relations found that **“tens of billions of dollars” in humanitarian aid were poured into Ukraine's neighbors during the war's first year.**

“As the conflict enters its second year with no end in sight,” the report says, “experts worry

that host countries are growing fatigued.”

Weeks ago I learned that the American intelligence community was aware that some officials in Western Europe and the Baltic states want the war between Ukraine and Russia to end. These officials have concluded that it is time for Zelensky to “come around” and seek a settlement. A knowledgeable American official told me that some in the leadership in Hungary and Poland were among those working together to get Ukraine involved in serious talks with Moscow. “Hungary is a big player in this and so are Poland and Germany, and they are working to get Zelensky to come around,” the American official said. The European leaders have made it clear that “Zelensky can keep what he’s got”—a villa in Italy and interests in offshore bank accounts—“if he works up a peace deal even if he’s got to be paid off, if it’s the only way to get a deal.”

So far, the official said, Zelensky has rejected such advice and ignored offers of large sums of money to ease his retreat to an estate he owns in Italy. There is no support in the Biden Administration for any settlement that involves Zelensky’s departure, and the leadership in France and England “are too beholden” to Biden to contemplate such a scenario. There is a reality that some elements in the American intelligence community can’t ignore, the official said, even if the White House is ignoring it: “Ukraine is running out of money and it is known that the next four or months are critical. And Eastern Europeans are talking about a deal.” The issue for them, the official told me, “is how to get the United States to stop supporting Zelensky,” The White House support goes beyond the needs of the war: “We are paying all of the retirement funds—the 401k’s—for Ukraine.”

And Zelensky wants more, the official said.

“Zelensky is telling us that if you want to win the war you’ve got to give me more money and more stuff. He tells us, ‘I’ve got to pay off the generals.’ He’s telling us”—if he is forced out of office—“he’s going to the highest bidder. He’d rather go to Italy than stay and possibly get killed by his own people.”

“All of this talk is being reported and is now flying around inside the American intelligence community, but, as usual,” the official said, “it’s not clear to the intelligence community what the president and his foreign policy aides in the White House know of the reality” of the European discussion about finding a way to end the war.

“We are still training Ukrainians how to fly our F-16s that will be shot down by Russia as soon as they get into the war zone. The mainstream press is dedicated to Biden and the war and Biden is still talking about the Great Satan in Moscow while the Russian economy is doing great. Putin can stay where he is”—in power—“despite his failure to wipe Ukraine off the map as an independent state. And he thought he would win the war with just one airborne division”—a sardonic reference to Russia’s failed effort in the first days of the war to seize a vital airport by parachuting in an attack force.

“Europe’s problem,” the official said, in terms of getting a quick settlement to the war, ***“is that the White House wants Zelensky to survive while there are others”—in Russia and in some European capitals—“who say Zelensky has got to go, no matter what,”***

It’s not clear that this understanding has gotten to the Oval Office. I have been told that some of the better intelligence about the war does not reach the president, through no fault of those who prepare the often contrary assessments. Biden is said to rely on briefings and other materials prepared by Avril Haines, director of National Intelligence, since the Biden Administration came into office. She has spent much of her career working for Secretary of State Anthony Blinken, whose ties to Biden and agreement with him on matters pertaining to Russia and China go back decades.

The one saving grace for some in the community, I have been told, has been CIA Director William Burns.

Burns was ambassador to Russia and deputy secretary of State and is seen as someone “who has come around” in opposition to some of the White House’s foreign policy follies. “He doesn’t want to be a rat on a sinking ship,” the official told me.

On the other hand, I have been told, it’s not clear to those in the CIA who prepare the President’s Daily Brief that Joe Biden is a regular reader of their intelligence summary. The document is usually three pages. Decades ago I was told—by someone who begged me not to write about it at the time—that Ronald Reagan rarely read the PDB until Colin Powell, then in the White House, began reading it to a video recorder. The tape would then be played for the president. It’s unclear who, if anyone, might take the initiative as Biden’s Colin Powell.

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