

WikiLeaks: Putin's 'Personal Gripe' With Estonia Result of WWII Betrayal

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Estonian farmers betrayed the father of Prime Minister Vladimir Putin to the Nazis during World War II — and this is what is fueling tensions between Moscow and Tallinn 60 years on, according to new U.S. cables leaked by WikiLeaks.

WikiLeaks released last week the final portion of an archive of U.S. diplomatic cables that it obtained in 2010.

The batch numbers 251,287 cables, including about 4,000 pertaining to Russia, but one in particular started making rounds in the Russian blogosphere after being published by Kommersant on Monday.

A cable dating back to December 2009 cites the Estonian Foreign Ministry's undersecretary and ambassador to Afghanistan and Pakistan, Harri Tiido, as saying that "Estonia seeks pragmatic relations with Russia and has managed a number of productive working level

meetings over 2008."

But relations remained "difficult at the political level" because of Putin, who alone decides the policy toward Estonia even after trading the presidency for the prime minister's post in 2008, Tiido said.

"Putin has a personal gripe with Estonia," Tiido is quoted as saying.

Putin's father, also Vladimir, fought in the Red Army during the war and parachuted into Estonia for an unspecified operation. But locals, still disgruntled with the country's occupation by the Soviet Union in 1940 — a year before the Germans invaded Estonia — handed him over to the Nazi forces, Tiido said. Putin's father later managed to flee but was injured as he left, he said.

The cable was classified by U.S. Ambassador to Estonia Michael Polt as confidential.

In a separate cable, dated February 2010 and also classified as confidential, Estonian Economic Affairs and Communications Minister Juhan Parts told the U.S. ambassador that Estonia is interested in boosting economic ties with Russia despite Moscow's official stance of blaming all political tensions on Tallinn.

Putin only last month praised his father's heroic exploits during World War II. During a visit to the Seliger summer camp for pro-Kremlin youth, he recounted a story of how his father was one of the four survivors of a 28-member partisan squad acting beyond enemy lines. He did not mention Estonia.

Neither Putin nor his press office have made any public comment on the cable.

Putin got his share of scathing descriptions in previous cables gradually released since last year. The most well-known attested him as the "alpha dog" of the country and said President Dmitry Medvedev, whom Putin endorsed in the 2008 presidential run, "plays Batman to Putin's Robin." A prime minister's spokeswoman said at the time that they "found nothing interesting or deserving comment in the material."

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