

# Retired British general predicts war with Russia, denounces Cameron government as “semi-pacifist”

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On Wednesday, retired British general Sir Alexander Richard Shirreff, NATO’s deputy supreme allied commander in Europe between 2011 and 2014, published *2017: War with Russia*.

In a speculative work, Shirreff argues that Russia’s annexation of Crimea inevitably sets the stage for wider conflict. He writes that Russia, in order to escape “perceived” encirclement by NATO, will seize territory in eastern Ukraine, open up a land corridor to Crimea and invade the Baltic states. His scenario names Latvia as the first of the Baltic countries to be invaded and even pencils in the approximate date--May 2017.

Before joining NATO, Shirreff served in Northern Ireland, Iraq and the Balkans. He claims his narrative is closely modelled on his NATO experience of war-gaming future conflicts. He used the book launch at London’s Royal United Services Institute to argue for a massive military buildup of NATO forces in the Baltic. Plans are already in place to begin such an escalation following a NATO summit in Warsaw in July.

Shirreff states his belief that Russian President Vladimir Putin would threaten nuclear action if NATO attempted to intervene in a Russian invasion of the Baltic countries, writing: “Be under no illusion whatsoever--Russian use of nuclear weapons is hardwired into Moscow’s military strategy.”

The claim that Russia is the aggressor, and not the imperialist powers encircling it, is repeated in the foreword to Shirreff’s book by US Admiral James Stavridis, former supreme allied commander in Europe. He writes, “Under President Putin, Russia has charted a dangerous course that, if it is allowed to continue, may lead inexorably to a clash with NATO. And that will mean a war that could so easily go nuclear.”

Shirreff has become an open critic of the ruling Conservatives, decrying their lack of readiness for nuclear conflict with Russia. The right-wing Tory *Daily Telegraph* is promoting his book and conducted an interview Tuesday, highlighting his assertion that Britain has become “introspective” and “self-absorbed.” The *Telegraph* states that the book “criticises the demise of Britain’s standing on the world stage and its creeping unwillingness to engage militarily overseas.”

“He said Britain’s recapture of the Falklands in 1982 had impressed the world, including Russia, but that was now being lost by a government ‘terrified of being seen to commit.’”

Shirreff highlighted comments made by Prime Minister David Cameron in 2014 that “Britain should avoid sending armies to fight,” stating that the impact on allies and potential adversaries was “profound.” Shirreff elaborated, “A country famous for once ‘walking softly and carrying a big stick’... now had a leadership that shouted loudly but, thanks to ongoing defence cuts, carried an increasingly tiny and impotent stick.”

Shirreff complained that the massive public spending cuts needed to fund increases in military spending have not been carried through with sufficient brutality. Britain is “now little different from any other semi-pacifist European social democracy, more interested in protecting welfare and benefits than maintaining adequate defences,” he said.

Shirreff related a dispute in 2014 with then-Defence Secretary Philip Hammond after the general wrote a piece in the *Sunday Times* questioning cuts to the armed forces. “The defence secretary was so infuriated

at being questioned in public that I was summoned by General Sir Peter Wall, the chief of the general staff and head of the army, and told that the defence secretary wanted ‘formal action’ against me.” He continued, “However, formal action would have involved a court martial and, fortunately for the latter’s political reputation--it also seems he had not appreciated that I reported to NATO and not to him--wiser counsel had prevailed.”

Shirreff was a participant in a BBC production, *World War Three: Inside The War Room*, aired in February. The premise of the film was that as international tensions reached a boiling point, “a committee of senior former British military and diplomatic figures comes together to war game a hypothetical ‘hot war’ in Eastern Europe, including the unthinkable--nuclear confrontation.”

They discuss a scenario in which Russia launches a tactical nuclear strike against British and American vessels in the Baltic Sea, destroying two ships with 1,200 British Marines and crew killed. In response, Washington launches a nuclear attack on a military installation in Russia.

A more aggressive stance towards Russia has become part of daily military planning, with Britain, as NATO’s largest military power in Europe, intimately involved in all its machinations. The 1991 dissolution of the USSR and the restoration of capitalism throughout Eastern Europe left the Russian-administered Kaliningrad region cut off from any land route to the rest of Russia. The territory is surrounded by Poland to the south and Latvia to the north and east, both of which have subsequently become members of NATO. As a result, any Russian military plane flying to and from Kaliningrad must fly over the airspace of Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia, making it a target for NATO intercepts.

In recent months, Royal Air Force (RAF) aircraft have stepped up interceptions of Russian aircraft. On Tuesday, the Ministry of Defence (MoD) said the RAF scrambled Typhoon fighters to intercept five unidentified Russian jets approaching the Estonian border. The MoD said the Typhoons shadowed two Su-27 Flanker fighters and an IL-20 “Coot-A” reconnaissance aircraft north of Estonia before two more Su-27s were detected and locked onto.

This follows an incident just days before, on May 13,

when Typhoons from the Amari Air Base in Estonia were scrambled to intercept three Russian transport aircraft approaching the Baltic.

In April, four RAF jets were deployed to join the Baltic Air Policing (BAP) mission, operating alongside Portuguese F16s from Šiauliai in Lithuania. BAP is a NATO exercise in which alliance members without their own air policing assets are assisted by other members in four-month cycles. This was the third consecutive year that UK jets have taken part in BAP. On the last occasion Typhoons were stationed as part of the NATO mission, they were scrambled 17 times to intercept over 40 Russian aircraft. During one launch last July, Typhoon fighters intercepted 10 separate Russian aircraft, including eight fighters.

Defence Secretary Michael Fallon said at the time, “This is another example of just how important the UK’s contribution to the Baltic Air Policing Mission is. We were able to respond instantly to this act of Russian aggression--a demonstration of our commitment to NATO’s collective defence. We will continue to secure the Baltic skies on behalf of NATO and our allies.”

The presence of RAF warplanes over towns and cities across Britain is becoming a regular occurrence. On April 21, four aircraft in formation--two Typhoons from RAF Leeming and two French AF Rafales--flew across northern England heading towards Wales. This was part of a two-week combined training exercise between UK and French forces. The exercise, dubbed Exercise Griffin Strike, was the latest operation of the Combined UK and French Joint Expeditionary Force and involved 5,000 military personnel.

The exercise saw British and French warships manoeuvring off the south and west coasts of England. On Salisbury Plain, the Army’s 3 (UK) Division and French 7th Mechanised Brigade, including armoured units and infantry, trained together.

The operation took place as more than 3,400 NATO troops from across Europe and the US took part in Exercise Joint Warrior, mainly off the coast of Scotland.



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