

# Divisions mount in UK military over US presidential race

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Sir Richard Shirreff, a recently-retired British general, has publicly declared his opposition to Republican US presidential candidate Donald Trump.

Speaking to the Conservative *Daily Telegraph*, Shirreff, NATO's deputy supreme allied commander in Europe between 2011 and 2014, said, "Here we are days from the election and that's a real, real threat—Trump saying he might not commit to article 5."

Article 5 of the US-led NATO constitution commits each of its members to come to the aid militarily of any member facing attack.

Shirreff added, "The defence of Europe during the Cold War depended on total certainty that whichever president was in the Oval Office, of whatever party, [the US] would come to Europe's defence."

Shirreff is a vocal advocate of Britain gearing up for war with Russia, as part of NATO. Earlier this year he published a book entitled *2017: War with Russia: An Urgent Warning from Senior Military Command*.

Among Britain's ruling elite there is grave concern for the future of Europe over the outcome of an election being contested by the two most unpopular candidates in US history. Following the June referendum vote to leave the European Union (EU), Britain is in the midst of a constitutional and political crisis without precedent in the post-war period. Such is the febrile atmosphere that the discussion in ruling circles on the US elections is focused on its implications for the NATO alliance, for the security of the European powers and on the issue of war preparations against Russia, in which Britain is playing a major role.

Shirreff's intervention was in opposition to that of General Lord Richards, Chief of the Defence Staff from 2010 to 2013. Last week, Richards argued that a devastating war between the US and its allies against Russia was less likely if Trump is elected to the White

House. Speaking to Parliament's the *House* magazine, Richards said, "It's non-state actors like Isis that are the biggest threat to our security. If countries and states could coalesce better to deal with these people—and I think Trump's instinct is to go down that route—then I think there's the case for saying that the world certainly won't be any less safe. It's that lack of understanding and empathy with each other as big power players that is a risk to us all at the moment."

Richards warned of the imminent danger of a war with Russia, which would immediately embroil the UK as America's main ally, if Hillary Clinton came to power. He said of the war in Syria, in which the Russian government is backing the regime of Bashar al-Assad, while opposition militias backed by US and Britain are fighting to remove him: "Unless she's [Clinton] prepared to do this properly and go to war with Russia, she shouldn't talk about no-fly zones and nor should we. We would have to shoot down Russian aircraft in order to impose it. Do we really want to go to a shooting war over Aleppo?"

He warned, "The alternative is for the West to declare a no-fly zone and that means you've got to be prepared to go to war with Russia ultimately. I see no appetite for that and nor, frankly, do I see much sense in it."

Accompanying Shirreff's comments, Lord West of Spithead, a former First Sea Lord and Labour government security minister, commented on a new Russian battle tank. He told the *Daily Telegraph* he was "very concerned" about a Russian military build-up. West described Russia's economy as "a war economy. They have got the GDP of Italy and they are trying to spend the same on defence as America. What they are doing is unsupportable and when something is unsupportable, then anything could happen."

One would not know from West's comments that the

main NATO powers are squandering vast amounts of their own GDPs on preparing for war with Russia and China.

In August, West told the *Daily Star*, “If the EU starts to break up and things go badly wrong in Europe, which I think they might well do, we have historically twice in the last century had to go and sort it out at immense cost of blood and treasure to our nation.”

On China, West said, “I do not believe we can let the Americans handle that on their own, we have to stand by them.”

Britain’s ruling Conservatives, backed by the opposition Labour Party, recently signed off on the renewal of the Trident nuclear missile system at an estimated cost of over £200 billion (almost twice the annual cost of the UK’s National Health Service.)

The intervention of top military figures in political affairs is now a regular occurrence and is indicative of the disintegration of British democracy. In September 2015, in the immediate aftermath of the landslide victory of Labour “left” Jeremy Corbyn in the party’s leadership contest, the *Sunday Times* carried comments from a “senior serving general” that in the event of Corbyn becoming prime minister, there would be “the very real prospect” of “a mutiny.” Elements within the military would be prepared to use “whatever means possible, fair or foul,” the officer declared.

Just weeks later Britain’s highest ranking military officer—Chief of the Defence Staff Sir Nicholas Houghton—was asked by the BBC’s Andrew Marr about Corbyn’s statement that he would never authorise the use of nuclear weapons. He replied, “Well, it would worry me if that thought was translated into power.”

The constitutional crisis opened by the Brexit referendum and the attempt by the defeated pro-EU camp to overturn the vote has prompted a further extraordinary intervention by senior military figures. Lord West and Lord Dannatt, the former head of the army, vented their opposition to last week’s High Court’s judgement that Prime Minister Theresa May cannot trigger Article 50—beginning the process of leaving the EU—via Royal Prerogative powers bypassing parliament. One of the powers it covers is the “control, organisation and disposition of the Armed Forces.”

Lord Dannatt told the *Sunday Telegraph*, “This

judgement should not be allowed to impact on the future use of the Royal Prerogative as far as authorising military action is concerned. I fear it might, but it is up to the Government now to make it quite clear that that linkage is not legitimate and should not be made.”

He added, “That is kind of consensus government, whereas actually the Prime Minister has to be a leader, to take decisions and live with the consequences.”

Lord West said, “There are people who don’t like the ability to use the Royal Prerogative to react and go to war rapidly if you need to as a nation and I’m afraid they are wrong. We elect a government and the whole duty of a government is to govern. There may be an occasion where you have to take action because the time to act is so little. You can’t go and have a debate in Parliament about it.”

The mounting anxiety over the US elections in Britain is expressed throughout Europe.

Most European leaders want a victory for Hilary Clinton, who they believe will safeguard, at least for the time being, transatlantic economic, political and military relations. But there are opposed positions in every country. In France, Marine Le Pen, the leader of the neo-fascist National Front is a serious contender in the presidential elections in April/May next year. As someone who has argued for more friendly relations with Russian President Vladimir Putin, Le Pen has endorsed Trump, stating that he “is a less harmful candidate than Hillary Clinton.” “Clinton is war,” she added.



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