

Retired NATO General Says All-Out War 'Plausible' Within a Year

The world is on the verge of a conflict that could erupt into World War III, and nuclear war between the U.S. and Russia, according to a retired NATO general.

In fact, that's pretty much the summary of the headline that ran Wednesday evening at the website. Formerly known as "Russia Today," it is a government-funded international news organization dedicated to providing the Russian "spin" on world news.

It is based on an interview General Sir Richard Shirreff, the former NATO Deputy Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, gave to BBC Radio 4. The general was promoting his new book, *2017: War With Russia*, a fictional account of just how such a war might unfold.

During the interview, Shirreff suggested his story was "entirely possible," due to current world events:

From a perception of weakness from the West, I think we need to judge [Russian President Vladimir Putin] by his deeds not his words. He's invaded Georgia, he's invaded the Crimea, he's invaded Ukraine, he's used force ... and seen he's gotten away with it.

In a period of tension, I think an attack on the Baltic States—and we need to remember this is about the Baltic States' vulnerability—such an attack is entirely plausible ... We need to remember that Lithuania, Estonia, and, indeed, Latvia, have significant ethnic Russian-speaking populations.

I am absolutely certain they are loyal citizens of those countries, but the way that the Kremlin propaganda machine has demonstrated it can manipulate minorities, get under their skin, means that we need to be very careful, and we need to be ready to take the necessary action, and we need to recognize the volatility of those states ...

[If Russia were to act, saying it is “defending” the Baltic States], the chilling fact is, because Russia hardwires ... nuclear capability and thinking into every aspect of their defense capability, this would be nuclear war, which is why I come back to the point that we must ensure that this can never happen.

During the brief interview, Shirreff frequently emphasized “effective deterrence.” He said that deterrence, coupled with “conditional dialogue”—Russia must acknowledge international law and the sovereignty of the smaller, former Soviet satellite states at its borders—would go a long way toward averting such a war with Russia:

This means permanently placed forces in and around the Baltic States, because what NATO needs to be able to do is to raise the bar sufficiently high for any aggressor to say, ‘It’s simply not worth the risk.’ I would argue that the bar is not high enough at the moment.

These are NATO countries. They are loyal NATO members. It’s NATO’s duty and purpose to defend its members. The way to avert potential catastrophe, as I say, is effective deterrence ...

We have enjoyed peace in Europe for 70 years. We need to continue to enjoy peace, and the way to prevent this, as I say, is effective deterrence.