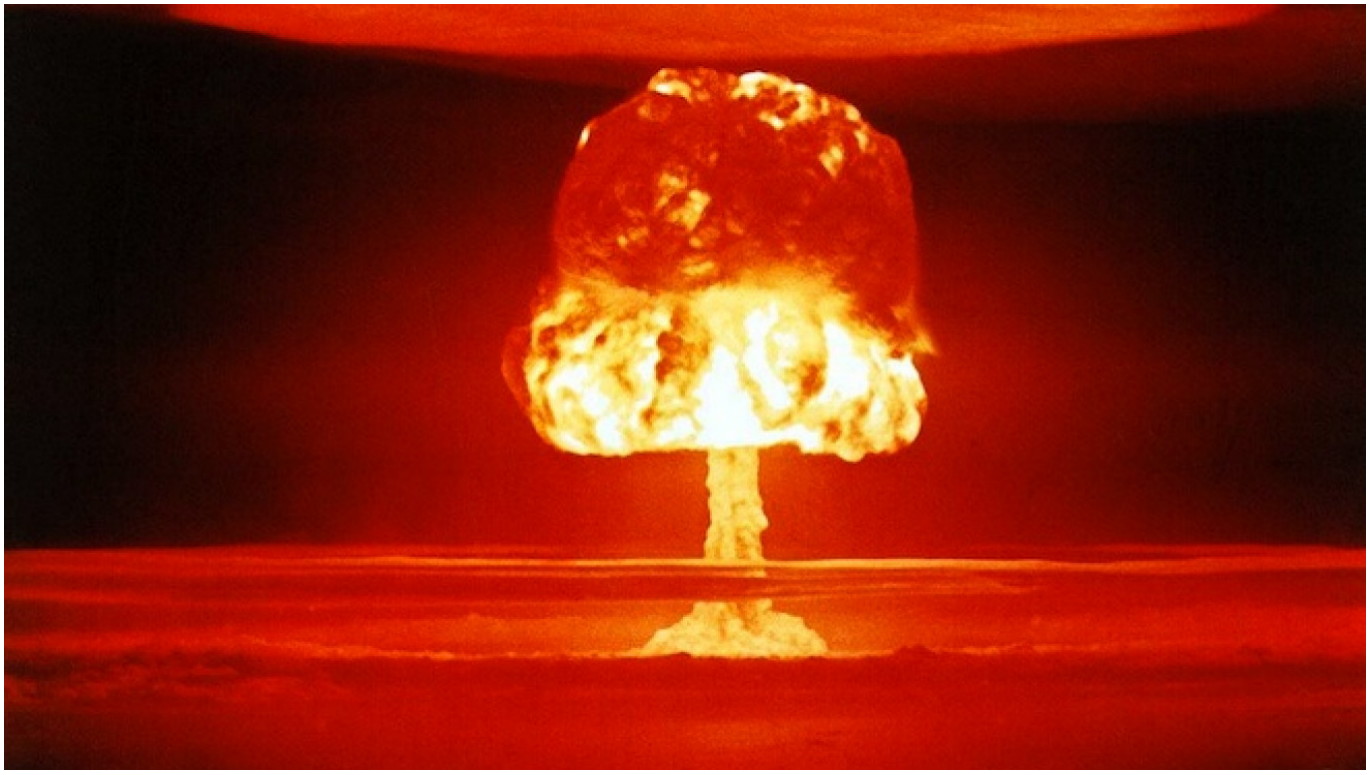
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NATO Risks Nuclear War with Russia, Retired General Warns

By The Moscow Times

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NATO must bolster its military presence in the Baltic states or risk nuclear war, a former general has warned.

Sir Richard Shirreff was NATO's former Deputy Supreme Allied Commander in Europe between 2011 and 2014.

In an interview on BBC Radio 4, Shirreff said that in periods of tensions, an attack on the Baltic states was entirely plausible.

"We need to judge President Putin by his deeds not his words," Shirreff said. "He has invaded Georgia, he has invaded Crimea, he has invaded Ukraine. He has used force and got away with it."

"The chilling fact is that because Russia hardwires nuclear thinking and capability to every aspect of their defense capability, [if Russia did attack the Baltic] this would be nuclear war".

Tensions have risen along Russia's eastern border after NATO activated a controversial US-led missile defense system in Romania on May 12. A second site will be installed in Poland.

Russian authorities have called the missile shield's installation “an act of aggression,” while NATO officials claim their function is to defend against a North Korean and Iranian missile attack.

“NATO needs to raise the bar sufficiently high for any aggressor to say it is not worth the risk," said Shirreff. President Putin could be persuaded into the Baltic States through the perception of a weakened NATO, where he would use similar tactics as in Crimea, he said.

Shirreff has often been outspoken on NATO spending and policy. The Briton particularly has criticized recent defense cuts in the UK, writing that “a country famous for once ‘walking softly and carrying a big stick,' now had a leadership that shouts loudly but, thanks to ongoing defense cuts, carries an increasingly tiny and impotent stick.”

Shirreff made the comments during a promotional tour for his new book, which features nuclear war in the Baltic states.

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