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## **HYPED-UP RUSSIA READY FOR WORLD WAR THREE BUT NOT FOR THE REASON YOU THINK, WARNS AMBASSADOR**

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Having dealt with Russia for more than 20 years in the Foreign Office and served as British Ambassador to Russia between 2004 and 2008, we are in the most dangerous situation in our relations I have ever seen.

In Russia all the talk is of a second Cold War, with active preparations for fighting a hot war if necessary.

We have already seen clashes between Russia and the West over Georgia, then Crimea, then Ukraine.

Now we have Syria , where Russia is supporting dictator President Bashar al-Assad and bombing besieged east Aleppo mercilessly.

What looks like deliberate targeting of hospitals, where wounded civilians seek life-saving surgery, would amount to appalling breaches of international humanitarian law.

Russias actions have prompted worldwide condemnation and the very real possibility that the US and UK might try to impose a no-fly zone which Americas most senior general has acknowledged would mean war with Russia.

Hillary Clinton has backed the no-fly zone idea and is a leading hawk on Russia.

She is also the most likely next President of the US. For its part, Russias displays of strength have come thick and fast, each a deliberate demonstration of preparedness for war.

They have released photographs of a new, horrific nuclear weapon dubbed Satan 2, capable of obliterating an area the size of France.

Russians Conduct Nuclear-Bomb Survival DrillsRussians Conduct Nuclear-Bomb survival drills

They sent a flotilla of warships bound for Syria into the English Channel, prompting British naval ships to man-mark them every step of the way.

President Vladimir Putin has sent Russian Blackjet bombers towards UK airspace off the Shetland Islands – similar aggressive movements were made in February and last November.

There have been numerous incidents over the past year in which Russian jets have buzzed US air

and sea traffic, coming within 30ft.

Just a couple of weeks ago in Kaliningrad, the Russians deliberately exposed missiles that are capable of carrying nuclear warheads, so US satellites could see them.

And they have over the past month cancelled a whole series of nuclear disarmament agreements with the US.

Senior military officers have talked explicitly of the likelihood of war with the West, even though Putin vowed he had no intention of attacking Europe.

They are behaving as toughly and aggressively as I have ever seen them.

If we act on Syria in any way that could escalate to a Russian attack, they are signalling as clearly as they can that they would retaliate.

GettySyrian men carrying babies make their way through the rubble  
Syrian men carrying babies make their way through the rubble

These are not empty threats. For Russia backing down is now close to impossible. The loss of face would almost certainly be the end of Putin.

I have met him. He is hard-headed, well-briefed and ruthless.

He knows the West is vastly stronger than Russia and believes we are out to do Russia down. He is determined this will not happen.

Yes, we are in a dangerous situation. Russia means business. But Russia is weak. Its military expenditure is one tenth of that of the West, its economy one twentieth.

They do not want war. They would lose. These shows of strength are not an intention to fight, but a signal that fighting must be avoided.

GettyRussian President Vladimir Putin attends a meeting with activists of the All-Russian People's Front in Yalta, Crimea  
Russian President Vladimir Putin wouldn't take a gamble

Putin is also a calculating man - he would not gamble.

As the Roman quote goes: If you want peace, prepare for war. That is what the Russians are doing.

We have just seen four-day drills of 40 million people to ready them for nuclear war.

Footage revealed crews in protective suits and gas masks participating, and the exercise reportedly included 200,000 rescue specialists and nearly 50,000 vehicles.

However, during the Cold War, the Soviet Union was far stronger than the current Russia is and we still managed to avoid nuclear war, despite a few close calls.

Dover Marina.com  
Amazing photographs of Putin's warships off coast of Dover  
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Lets be clear □ Russia does not want war. It would obliterate millions of its own as well as its enemy.

So we need now to revert to the tactic we used then to avoid an escalation towards it.

We need to respect each others vital interests.

Russia wont deliberately attack Nato countries. I do not believe they will attempt to invade Estonia, where we have sent 800 troops this week.

They know that would mean a direct Nato retaliation. And, as I said, they would lose.

Our troops there this week are a clear warning to Russia. Few as they are, they are a trip-wire if Russia was to make a move.

But Russia does see Syria and Ukraine as vital interests. Therefore we have to stand back, just as we did not -interfere when they sent troops into Czechoslovakia in 1968 for example.

And they didnt intervene over our invasion of Egypt in 1956.

By holding back and treating each other with a pinch of respect, we avoided a real war. We now need to go back to that way of thinking to avoid a war in the future.

There is no doubt Russia is very hyped up. They see a real threat of confrontation with the West.

It is clearly a very dicey situation. But peace still lies in our hands.

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