

REALM DEFENCE



by **Ralph Berry**

Now thrive the armourers. But the plans they are to execute have changed radically. The new reality is AUKUS, whose arrangements have been settled at San Diego. The actual nuclear-powered submarines will be built in Australia, probably South Australia. The US will be responsible for the high-end, high-tech input. Britain, with its long tradition of ship-building, is guaranteed ceaseless high-quality work in its ship-yards. No other nation can challenge the charmed trio, who are well used to working with each other in peace and war, as the historian Andrew Roberts chronicled in *MASTERS AND COMMANDERS*. This tripartite agreement has every appearance of reversing the traditional costs of war: sound defence and financial gain go together.

All this is terrible news for the traditional purveyors of defence, no expense spared or indeed justified. Rishi Sunak

has announced a paltry “£5bn major defence investment”. Most of the funds are headed for the nuclear submarines programme, and rocketing inflation alone has raised project costs by £2.1bn.

What has happened is that the Treasury has been quietly seething for years over Defence’s incontinence and incompetence, Its patience has now been allowed to snap. Like George Herbert, “I struck the board, and cried No More! I will Abroad!” Abroad, as it turned out, meant the far east. Stiff news for the Army, long devoted to Europe, as the main theatre. A brief recital will suffice. Tanks, the Army’s darling, are now seen as fragile shadows since they must be deployed with an extensive entourage that only a full-scale war could justify.

The ineptly-named Ajax light tank is a £6bn turkey that is delayed for another four years. As for the Royal Navy, its single aircraft carrier set off on its maiden voyage to NY, but had to turn back after couple of nautical miles afflicted by mysterious engine problems.

Nothing more has been seen or heard of the flagship. Is it a wonder that AUKUS offers glittering alternatives to Defence as defined by its traditional beneficiaries?

They took it on the chin, in a dolorous acceptance of the inevitable.

General Lord Dannatt likened the new plan to “the parsimony of the 1930s all over again...The decision not to plough significantly more money on the Army was ultimately very dangerous for European security. That weakness is reminiscent of the 1930s when we refused to rearm until it was too late.”

Two great truths. 1) All arguments based on the 1930s are dud arguments.

2) All arguments based on “appeasement” as allegedly practised

in the 1930s are dud arguments. General Lord Dannatt should bone up on history. It is not his long suit.