

# ‘THERE IS A 1939 FEEL TO THE WORLD RIGHT NOW’ (Telegraph)



by Ralph Berry

**Well, there would be.** Our rulers are fascinated with the idea that the dangers threatening the land are so acute that extreme measures are called for. All of them involve spending even more money on defence. The favourite fear is Russia, with whom our leading astrologers predict that we shall be at war, in 20 years' time. If so, I fear for the Russians.

They have no idea what they will be up against.

A citizen army. Aux armes, citoyens.

Sir Patrick Sanders, head of the army, says the UK needs a military that could not only expand rapidly but also 'train and equip' a citizen army. This means conscription, a policy abandoned by the UK save in wartime. He wants there to be a

shift in the mindset of British men and women, in which they think like troops and are mentally prepared for a possible war with Russia. Only Russia?

There is form for a conscript army in peacetime. Britain had it for years following the Korean war in 1952. Michael Caine, who served in Korea, was no great fan. Few were. Pay was abysmal, with £1 a week for the first six months. The period of service was two years, in which it is hardly possible to train for anything difficult or interesting. You could indeed have a longer period, with all manner of exciting prospects, but you had to sign on for a longer period.

The great majority preferred to get their lives back. The children who inhabit our universities, staff and students, have never heard of the Korean war anyway.

Still, the topmost brass loves conscripts. Sir Patrick is backed all the way by General Lord Dannatt, his predecessor, even though the mass of military officials hate national service as of course does the general public. Boris Johnson has just joined in the pro-citizen call, a voice sure to create high-pitched discord everywhere. The Government, which was not consulted before Sir Patrick's outburst, immediately shot down his cunning plan. And I haven't mentioned money, a subject that would sink an aircraft carrier and almost certainly will. The media discuss the Government's ambition to raise the nation's defence spending to 2.5% or higher. They do not mention that defence includes military pensions; all the gold-plated admirals (etc.) are safe from spending cuts. They will urge their readiness for the government to make all necessary sacrifices to protect defence, none of which will be incurred by the pension holders.

The huge coming event has just been revealed. The UNITED STATES is planning to station nuclear weapons in the UK for the first time in 15 years, as Pentagon documents seen by the *Telegraph* reveal. They include procurement contracts for a

new facility at RAF Lakenheath, Suffolk. I confine my comment to Bette Davis. 'Fasten your seatbelts, it's going to be a bumpy ride.'