

**Jump TO Article**



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# Royal United Services Institute of Australia

*Promoting national security awareness*

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## National President's Column: an Australian military covenant

The idea of a Defence covenant, a set of protocols that underpin the mutual obligations between the Parliament (as the representative of the Australian people) and serving and former Australian Defence Force (ADF) members, flows on from an understanding of the uniqueness of service in the ADF.



The Commonwealth of Australia, as a sovereign national entity, has the constitutional right to raise, equip and train military forces for its defence. This right includes the right, under the law, to compel all or some of its citizens to render military service when it considers such compulsion necessary.

An essential factor in accepting or compelling military service from its citizens is the understanding that the nature of that service is unique, and in the ultimate involves the surrender in trust to the nation of the individual's fundamental rights to life, liberty and security of the person.

Accepting or compelling military service imposes on the nation an obligation to act within the law at all times when employing the ADF. It also requires the nation to ensure, as far as is compatible with the military mission, that the physical safety and the mental and spiritual welfare of each individual rendering service is protected and to provide for the care of those who suffer physical or mental injury or illness as a result of their service. The nation is also obliged to promote and protect the honour of the ADF as a whole and of the individuals who serve, or have served in it; preserving in the national life the memory of their deeds and sacrifice for the safety of the nation.

These mutual obligations are fundamental to the highest order Australian public good – the protection of its citizens – and warrant special and enduring recognition in the form of an Australian Military Covenant. It would serve as a symbolic and practical instrument designed to articulate the largely unwritten mutual obligations between the nation and the members of the ADF. Its purpose would not be to pre-suppose any demands for increased government support to ADF members past, present or future, but rather act as an expression of principle which should be a foundation for any policy initiatives impacting the serving and veteran communities.

While RUSI's charter does not run to this issue *per se*, it is the case that such a covenant would go to the role and contribution of our defence force personnel and so would underpin capability – something very much part of an informed national security and defence debate.

I encourage readers to support and promote the concept of a covenant through a concerted effort within your networks of family, friends and colleagues. More information can be found at <http://www.dfga.org.au/military-covenant>.

**Brent Espeland**