

# British Armed Forces Federation: Ready to Engage



Soldiers visit Parliament. Picture: Sergeant Ian Houlding, Crown Copyright/MOD 2009

**“There seems to be something wrong with our bloody ships today...”** said Admiral Beatty after watching his battle cruisers blowing up at Jutland, **“And with our system.”**

Nearly a century later the Coalition Government sees a lot wrong with the system of Defence, and with its funding.

How will armed forces personnel fare in the Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR) and its aftermath? Speculation has been mounting about the possible closure of major airbases, disbandment of armoured regiments, scrapping of helicopters, cancellation or cutback of equipment orders, cull of senior officers and further reduction of the fleet.

Any one of such cuts would, directly or indirectly, affect armed forces personnel. In the past, many discharged or reassigned personnel felt they had been treated well enough but at other times, under any hue of Government and especially during previous periods of national economic difficulty, service men and women have been let down by a system which utterly failed to represent their interests.

BAFF therefore welcomed the Defence Ministry’s indication that the Military Covenant will in some way be reflected in the SDSR.

The concept of a Military Covenant applies by extension to all the armed services, but is based on an

Army publication which says that in return for their sacrifices, British soldiers must always be able to expect fair treatment, to be valued and respected as individuals, and that they (and their families) will be sustained and rewarded by commensurate terms and conditions of service.

Defence Secretary Dr Liam Fox, has spoken of his aim to “update our practices and produce greater efficiency while implementing the Military Covenant.”

On his visit to HMS Ark Royal in June, the Prime Minister announced that the Covenant is to be given the force of law. We in the British Armed Forces Federation will want to see how this is drafted. We will consult about it and provide evidence, as we have before, to the House of Commons Bill Committee which considers the next Armed Forces Bill.

I was consulted by parliamentarians about the 2006 Electoral Administration Bill, and I served on the Service Voting Working Group which was set up by the Ministry of Justice in 2009. Future electoral and constitutional legislation, as it affects members of the armed forces community, is one of the issues which we look forward to engaging with on behalf of our serving members.

**Douglas Young**  
**Executive Chairman**

*Douglas Young is the Executive Chairman of the **British Armed Forces Federation (BAFF)**, which aims to support HM Forces by providing an independent non-politically-affiliated all-ranks professional staff association (not a trade union or service charity). A “specifically British solution” based on Australia and the USA as much as on any European model, **BAFF** has Observer status with the European Organisation of Military Associations, **EUROMIL**. The Federation welcomes enquiries from members of either House, and arranges briefings on request. Its website is at [www.baff.org.uk](http://www.baff.org.uk).*

