

Sarah Ingham, *The Military Covenant: Its Impact on Civil-Military Relations in Britain*. Farnham: Ashgate, 2014. Notes, Bibliography, Index. 231pp. ISBN 978-1-4724-2854-7 (Hardback). Price £65.00.

Many readers of the *Journal* will have heard in recent years of the military covenant, most likely accompanied by the assertion that it is broken. Fewer will know precisely what the covenant entails, where the notion came from, or what it all means for understanding the relationship between the armed forces and society in Britain today. Sarah Ingham sets out to illuminate these questions in her excellent study of the military covenant.

The book is based upon a doctoral thesis completed at King's College London, but speaks to a wider audience than just scholars of British defence policy. Besides being the most in-depth research yet published on the covenant itself, the book is amongst the best studies on civil-military relations in this country to be published in the last decade. Ingham writes with clarity, insight and impeccable objectivity. She casts a critical eye on politicians of all persuasions, senior army officers, the judiciary, soldiers who have brought disgrace on the army through mistreating prisoners in Iraq, and many others. Yet she is equally willing to recognise service and commitment. This judiciousness deserves credit and really stands out in what has become a fractious defence debate.

Based on a firm grounding in civil-military relations theory and extensive original research, the book is logically organised and thus easy for the reader to navigate. The rich interview material, notably with those who created and promoted the covenant concept, allows Ingham to develop a persuasive analysis. The covenant was invented in 2000 in a piece of military doctrine. Ingham defines the idea as 'an understanding: in exchange for their service and sacrifice, soldiers will be supported by the nation and by their chain of command' (p. 2). Codifying these relationships is quite a novel proposition for British military culture, which generally has preferred to keep things vague, in keeping with the constitution as a whole. Ingham argues that the migration of the concept from doctrine into public discourse has helped society to better understand the armed forces, and for the gulf between soldiers and citizens to be narrowed.

Dealing mainly with the period from 2000 to 2011, the book proceeds in seven chapters. The first provides historical context, making a strong case for dismissing government statements that the covenant is centuries old. Rather, as with much connected to the military, the tradition was invented for practical purposes. An idealised past has been evoked by the covenant's advocates to solidify support for the military today. In demolishing this mythology, Ingham usefully points out how the

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business of comprehending relations between soldiers and civilians is obfuscated whenever a unified civilian stance is said to exist (p. 37). In reality, civil society is normally divided in its attitudes towards the military; moments such as Armistice Day are an exception. The second chapter goes on to trace the covenant's origins and refinement in doctrine, a discussion perhaps most interesting to the expert reader. The rather ahistorical (and narrow) claim that doctrine only emerged in the UK from 1989 does not detract from the analysis' overall coherence. Chapter 3, which considers the legal dimensions, notes the Ministry of Defence's determination to frame the concept in moral terms, thus avoiding any legal liability for perceived breaches.

Chapters 4 and 5 provide the most original and important material. They cover, respectively, public opinion and policy-makers. Ingham shows how under the leadership of Chief of the General Staff, General Richard Dannatt, the army exploited the covenant to embarrass the government and strengthen its political position. The author treats this controversial period, from 2007-09, even-handedly, suggesting that, despite breaching constitutional norms by openly criticising the government, General Dannatt managed to galvanise public backing for service personnel when they needed it. Service men and women came to receive tangible public support, despite widespread antipathy towards the wars they were waging. The rest of the book examines the covenant and individual soldiers, and developments since 2010, when the covenant has been a less charged issue. The debate over the covenant cannot explain all aspects of civil-military relations. Governance within the army, for example, is better understood with reference to military culture. But Dr Ingham is to be congratulated for writing an important and thought-provoking book on Britain's armed forces and the people they protect.

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