

# RFC-011: Byzantine Consensus

**Status:** Proposed **Date:** January 2026 **Author:** Derrell Piper ddp@eludom.net

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## Abstract

This RFC specifies Byzantine fault-tolerant consensus for Cyberspace federation, enabling agreement among distributed vaults even when some participants are faulty or malicious.  $N$  nodes tolerate up to  $f$  failures where  $N \geq 3f + 1$ .

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## Motivation

Federation (RFC-010) assumes honest peers. Reality differs:

- **Crash failures:** Nodes go offline
- **Byzantine failures:** Nodes lie, equivocate, or attack
- **Network partitions:** Messages delayed or lost
- **Sybil attacks:** Fake identities flood the network

Byzantine consensus provides:

1. **Safety:** Honest nodes agree on same value
2. **Liveness:** System makes progress despite failures
3. **Fault tolerance:** Survives  $f$  failures with  $3f+1$  nodes

From Lamport, Shostak, and Pease (1982):

*The Byzantine Generals Problem: reaching agreement in the presence of traitors.*

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## Specification

### System Model

Nodes:  $N = 3f + 1$  (tolerates  $f$  Byzantine faults)  
Network: Asynchronous with eventual delivery  
Cryptography: Ed25519 signatures (authenticated channels)

### Consensus Properties

**Agreement:** If honest node  $i$  decides  $v$ , honest node  $j$  decides  $v$ .

**Validity:** If all honest nodes propose  $v$ , decision is  $v$ .

**Termination:** All honest nodes eventually decide.

## Protocol: Practical Byzantine Fault Tolerance (PBFT)

Phase 1: PRE-PREPARE

Primary broadcasts  $\square$ PRE-PREPARE,  $v$ ,  $n$ ,  $\text{sig}$

Phase 2: PREPARE

On valid PRE-PREPARE, broadcast  $\square$ PREPARE,  $v$ ,  $n$ ,  $\text{sig}$

Collect  $2f$  PREPARE messages

Phase 3: COMMIT

On  $2f+1$  PREPARE, broadcast  $\square$ COMMIT,  $v$ ,  $n$ ,  $\text{sig}$

Collect  $2f+1$  COMMIT messages

Decision:

On  $2f+1$  COMMIT, decide  $v$

## Message Formats

```
(consensus-message
 (type pre-prepare)
 (view 0)
 (sequence 42)
 (value-hash "sha512:...")
 (from #{$primary-pubkey})
 (signature #{$ed25519-sig}))
```

```
(consensus-message
 (type prepare)
 (view 0)
 (sequence 42)
 (value-hash "sha512:...")
 (from #{$replica-pubkey})
 (signature #{$ed25519-sig}))
```

```
(consensus-message
 (type commit)
 (view 0)
 (sequence 42)
 (from #{$replica-pubkey})
 (signature #{$ed25519-sig}))
```

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## View Change

When primary fails or is Byzantine:

1. Replica timeout on PRE-PREPARE

2. Broadcast  $\square$ VIEW-CHANGE,  $v+1$ , prepared-proofs $\square$
  3. New primary collects  $2f+1$  VIEW-CHANGE
  4. New primary broadcasts  $\square$ NEW-VIEW,  $v+1$ , proofs $\square$
  5. Resume protocol in new view
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## Application to Cyberspace

### Federation Ordering

```
(consensus-propose
  (action release-publish)
  (version "2.0.0")
  (proposer #${alice-key}))
```

*;; After consensus:*

```
(consensus-decided
  (sequence 42)
  (action release-publish)
  (version "2.0.0")
  (decided-by (quorum ...)))
```

### Threshold Governance Integration

Combine with RFC-007: - Consensus on *what* to do - Threshold signatures on *authorization*

```
(governance-decision
  (consensus-sequence 42)
  (action deploy-production)
  (threshold-met 3-of-5)
  (signers (alice carol dave)))
```

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## Optimizations

### Speculation

Execute optimistically before commit:

Tentative execution after  $2f+1$  PREPARE  
Rollback if COMMIT fails

### Batching

Amortize consensus over multiple operations:

```
(consensus-batch
  (sequence 42)
  (operations
    (release-publish "2.0.0")
    (release-publish "2.0.1")
    (config-update ...)))
```

## Fast Path

When all replicas agree initially:

Skip PREPARE phase

Direct to COMMIT with  $3f+1$  matching responses

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## Security Considerations

### Threat Model

**Tolerates:** -  $f$  Byzantine nodes (arbitrary behavior) - Network delays and re-ordering - Message loss (with retransmission)

**Requires:** -  $N \geq 3f + 1$  total nodes - Authenticated channels (signatures) - Eventual message delivery

### Attack Resistance

Attack	Mitigation
Equivocation	Signatures prove inconsistency
Replay	Sequence numbers, view numbers
Denial of service	View change, rate limiting
Sybil	SPKI admission control

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## Complexity

Metric	Value
Message complexity	$O(N^2)$ per decision
Communication rounds	3 (normal case)
Cryptographic operations	$O(N)$ signatures/verifies

## Implementation Notes

### State Machine

```
(define-record-type <pbft-state>
  (make-pbft-state view sequence log prepared committed)
  pbft-state?
  (view pbft-view)
  (sequence pbft-sequence)
  (log pbft-log)           ; sequence → messages
  (prepared pbft-prepared) ; sequence → value
  (committed pbft-committed)) ; sequence → value
```

### Dependencies

- crypto-ffi - Ed25519 signatures
  - audit - Decision logging
  - Network transport (TCP, QUIC)
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### References

1. Lamport, L., Shostak, R., & Pease, M. (1982). The Byzantine Generals Problem.
  2. Castro, M., & Liskov, B. (1999). Practical Byzantine Fault Tolerance.
  3. Yin, M., et al. (2019). HotStuff: BFT Consensus with Linearity and Responsiveness.
  4. RFC-007: Threshold Signature Governance
  5. RFC-010: Federation Protocol
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### Changelog

- **2026-01-06** - Initial specification
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**Implementation Status:** Proposed **Fault Tolerance:**  $f$  failures with  $3f+1$  nodes **Protocol Basis:** PBFT