

# A NATIONAL VETERANS STRATEGY: THE ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND SECURITY IMPERATIVE

Prepared by:

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## **ABOUT THIS REPORT:**

This publication is a collaborative effort of the Institute for Veterans and Military Families at Syracuse University and the Institute for National Security and Counterterrorism at Syracuse University's Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs and College of Law. The aim of this publication is to cultivate meaningful and substantive discourse related to national policy impacting the post-service life course of the men and women who have worn the cloth of this nation in military service. Specifically, this publication develops the case and foundational logic to support action toward crafting a National Veterans Strategy. The central premise and finding of this publication is that developing, articulating, and institutionalizing a National Veterans Strategy is necessary to serve important social, economic and security objectives, and is also consistent with the inherent social contract that defines the relationship between the nation and its veterans.

**Special Note:** This publication was not specifically sponsored or funded by sources external to the collaborating organizations and does not assume a political orientation with regard to the subject matter addressed in the report.

## **ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS:**

### **THE INSTITUTE FOR VETERANS AND MILITARY FAMILIES (IVMF), SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY**

The Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF) was founded in 2011 by Syracuse University as the result of a historic partnership with JPMorgan Chase & Co. As the first institute of its kind in the nation, the mission of the IVMF is to leverage the intellectual, programmatic, and human capital resources of higher education in support of the post-service life course of the nation's veterans and military families. Specifically, the IVMF focuses on developing impactful programming, cultivating actionable research, conducting policy analysis, and providing technical assistance positioned to address the social, economic, and public policy challenges facing the veterans' community. The IVMF team approaches this mission as a collaboration, forging enduring partnerships with government, private industry, institutions of higher education, philanthropic organizations, and other stakeholders committed to supporting transitioning service members, veterans, and their families.

### **THE INSTITUTE FOR NATIONAL SECURITY AND COUNTERTERRORISM (INSCT), SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY**

The Institute for National Security and Counterterrorism (INSCT) at Syracuse University was established through the vision of Professor William C. Banks at the College of Law in 2003 and later co-sponsored by the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs in 2004. The mission of INSCT is to provide cutting-edge interdisciplinary research, graduate-level education, and public service on law and policy challenges related to national and international security. INSCT's faculty and staff strive to deliver cutting-edge scholarship and a first-class educational experience for students through expertise across a range of disciplines and specialties, including defense policy and military operations, foreign affairs and diplomacy, homeland security, counterterrorism, national security law, peace and conflict studies, and cyber-security. INSCT promotes innovative educational programs and student engagement in advanced coursework by way of its Certificates of Advanced Studies (CAS), currently offered in the fields of security studies, counterterrorism law, and post-conflict reconstruction. INSCT places a special emphasis on forming research partnerships with national and international academic and non-academic institutes, as well as private individuals, in order to advance common goals, such as the co-sponsorship of the Journal of National Security Law and Policy.

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# Executive Summary

This publication details the foundational logic supporting a call to action, related to a broad-based effort to articulate and institutionalize a National Veterans Strategy.

We argue that coordinated, “whole-of-government” action toward this end is essential to meet the nation’s most important economic, social, and security obligations. Furthermore, we contend that the second Obama administration, working in close collaboration with executive agencies, Congress, and the private sector, is well-positioned to act on what we perceive to be a historic opportunity — capitalizing on both the foundations of veteran-focused policy and progress enacted over the past decade and the overwhelming public support for returning veterans and military families — to craft and institutionalize a National Veterans Strategy.

Our purpose is to provide a researched and logically-developed case for action that is grounded in this nation’s social and cultural traditions and attuned to the practical realities of our contemporary economic and political climate. Given this purpose, it is important to highlight what this publication is not. It is not our intent to:

- 1) Define what a National Veterans Strategy should espouse, with regard to issue-specific policy or practice; or
- 2) Identify or prioritize the many issue-based concerns that might inform or drive the process toward a National Veterans Strategy.

Instead, we suggest that these important issues represent outcomes resulting from a thoughtful and consensus-building strategy planning process. We do, however, suggest the basis for how such a strategy planning process might proceed.

## WHY NOW?

Why is now the time to act on a National Veterans Strategy?

- 1) The federal government’s tenuous, long-term fiscal trajectory is forcing policymakers to confront difficult choices

related to resource allocation, which may possibly affect funding for benefits and services impacting veterans and their families. A National Veterans Strategy will enable focused, efficient and principled fiscal decision-making.

- 2) The current institutional framework governing the scope of challenges affecting veterans and their families remains far too disparate, reactive, and administratively marginalized, despite the best intentions of many in the public and private sectors. A National Veterans Strategy is likely to support improved interagency and public-private coordination, in turn supporting strategic choices that position inherently limited resources in their first, best use.
- 3) It is reasonable and prudent to believe that, despite considerable goodwill toward veterans and military families that exists today, veteran-focused concerns may fade from public consciousness after 2014 as the nation moves past thirteen years of sustained war. Action now toward crafting a National Veterans Strategy is conducive to institutionalizing systems and practices that may sustain citizen- and government-wide investment in the nation’s veterans and military families into the future.
- 4) Research and data-driven scholarship that informs veterans’ policy is central to principled policy formulation, implementation and evaluation. A National Veterans Strategy is best positioned to cultivate, unite and organize an interdisciplinary field of veteran policy studies that may serve to balance economically rational decision-making with principled policymaking in the face of an increasingly constrained resource environment.
- 5) Assuming that the all-volunteer force (AVF) will endure, a strong social and cultural connection between those who volunteer for service and those who do not is necessary to engender broad societal support for the post-service challenges impacting veter-

ans and their families. A National Veterans Strategy that facilitates and institutionalizes a three-way dialogue between the public, the military, and the government reinforces stable civil-military relations through increased public engagement in veteran and military affairs.

- 6) The future of the AVF is dependent upon the military’s ability to continuously attract the nation’s most skilled, talented and service-minded individuals. A National Veterans Strategy is symbolic, but more importantly instrumental, in affirming America’s enduring commitment to both the AVF model and those who volunteer to serve (today and in the future).

## A NATIONAL VETERANS STRATEGY: THE FOUNDATIONAL ASSUMPTIONS

The economic, social and security foundations of a National Veterans Strategy should be grounded in a set of closely-held assumptions and attitudes about American citizenship, fairness, military service and civil-military relations. While not all-inclusive, the foundational assumptions informing a National Veterans Strategy include:

- 1) The social contract between American society and its veterans is inviolate, enduring and must be continuously upheld.
- 2) The social contract between American society and its veterans, *by extension*, confers a societal obligation to the families of those who serve.
- 3) While veterans are honored in American society today, this social distinction is neither a historical constant, nor is it assured for future generations.
- 4) The existing institutional arrangement governing veterans’ policy is not adequately informed or coordinated by a coherent “whole-of-government” policy or optimally integrated with private-sector efforts.
- 5) Changes to the rights, benefits and services that represent societal means of satisfying



the social contract between the nation and those who serve, should be principled, rational and coordinated.

- 6) A positive social perception of military service supports the AVF imperative of recruiting a high-quality and socio-economically representative force.
- 7) Efforts to support the post-service welfare of those who volunteer for service positively serves the AVF imperative of recruiting a high-quality and socio-economically representative force.

In this report we deconstruct these assumptions to illustrate their economic, social and national security implications and suggest how and why these assumptions inform the set of “guiding questions” appropriate to serve as a framework for a National Veterans Strategy planning process.

### **BUILDING CONSENSUS AND PROCESS: GUIDING QUESTIONS**

How would consensus around a National Veterans Strategy process proceed? We provide a set of guiding questions to: 1) constructively frame an inclusive dialogue on veterans’ issues and policy goals; and 2) serve as an initial framework from which to craft a strategic planning process, including the rules, incentives, oversight mechanisms, and resource coordination aimed at efficient and effective policy implementation. At the highest level, these questions include:

- 1) Who should be involved in a strategic conversation and planning process impacting veterans’ policy?
- 2) Why do we, as Americans, care for our veterans and their families?
- 3) Who is an American veteran?
- 4) What recognition, benefits or services ought the nation provide its veterans and their families?
- 5) What can the nation reasonably afford to provide its veterans, today and in the future?

- 6) How (and by who) should these benefits and services be delivered?

### **SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS**

We maintain that the second Obama administration, working in close partnership with Congress and the private sector, is well-positioned to act on a historic opportunity to craft and institutionalize a National Veterans Strategy.

Given the overwhelming public support for veterans and military families, combined with progress and momentum resulting from recent policy and practice successes, now is the time to act. We offer six initial recommendations as a path toward realizing the inherent potential of a National Veterans Strategy:

- 1) Create a presidentially directed Veterans’ Public Engagement and Collaborative Governance Commission, responsible for engaging a broad base of stakeholders in a dialogue on veterans’ issues.
- 2) Establish a single point of authority (directive and budgetary), responsible for coordinating and directing the execution of a National Veterans Strategy.
- 3) Establish an Interagency Policy Committee on Veterans, responsible for crafting a National Veterans Strategy.
- 4) Establish a standing National Veterans Advisory Board, responsible for providing strategic advice and counsel to the president, Congress and implementing agencies related to veteran’s policy.
- 5) Create and institutionalize a forward-looking, periodic review process designed to assess evolving veterans’ policy and programs across the federal government.
- 6) Create a voluntary coalition of private sector stakeholders, responsible for cultivating and formalizing a model of collaborative engagement that best aligns the resources of government, corporate, foundation and community partners in support of veterans and their families.

**“The repercussions of war persist for years and decades after the last shot is fired, but we seldom consider the inevitable costs, the economic consequences, and the impact on quality of life for those who fought and their families.**

**As a war-weary America returns from 13 years of exhausting conflict in Iraq and Afghanistan, we must put in a place a long-term strategy for taking care of the wounded, reconstructing lives and repaying war debts.”**

—Professor Linda J. Bilmes  
Harvard University  
Co-author of *The Three Trillion Dollar War: The True Cost of the Iraq Conflict*



**“As the end of the longest war in our nation’s history draws near, a National Veterans Strategy would serve as an enduring thank you on behalf of a grateful nation as our generation of veterans return home to their families.”**

—SMA Ken Preston (Ret.)  
13th Sergeant Major of the Army

**“Having a coherent articulation of the national responsibility for veterans’ support will be critical in the time ahead. I applaud this effort, concur that it is a worthy objective, and do not understate the magnitude of the challenge.”**

—Hon. Sean O’Keefe  
Chairman and CEO,  
EADS North America  
10th NASA Administrator  
69th Secretary of the Navy

## A National Veterans Strategy: The Economic, Social and Security Imperative

**A**s the end of America’s longest wartime chapter nears, questions about how the nation will support and empower its newest generation of military veterans have ascended in the national political discourse.

Academics, policy analysts, the media and veterans groups continue to highlight the need for collaborative and coordinated efforts to address the challenges, concerns, opportunities and innovations impacting the post-service life course of those who have shouldered the burden of the nation’s wars. Issues such as homelessness, suicide, mental health, unemployment, education and comprehensive access to benefits and healthcare sit atop this collective priority list (Berglass, 2010, 2012; Berglass & Harrell, 2012; Carter, 2012; Tanielian & Jaycox, 2008).

The Obama administration has made praiseworthy efforts to coordinate government-wide action focused on the issues impacting veterans and their families. Initiatives such as Joining Forces have heightened public awareness of the challenges facing many veterans and military families and have provided an opportunity for engaged citizens to act in response to those challenges (The White House, 2011). The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), Department of Defense (DoD), Department of Labor (DOL), Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the Small Business Administration (SBA), and other federal agencies have made meaningful strides toward transforming policies, practices and service delivery systems to better address the contemporary realities associated with supporting the post-service life course of the nation’s veterans (HCVA, 2012; HUD, 2012; The White House, 2012).<sup>1</sup> Further, Congress has demonstrated a pattern of largely bipartisan support and leadership focused on improving the situation of the nation’s veterans and families. Select examples of important legislative actions include the Veterans Opportunity to Work (VOW) to Hire Heroes Act, the Post-

9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act and the Honoring America’s Veterans & Caring for Camp Lejeune Families Act of 2012.

However, following more than 12 years of sustained war — and in light of current and planned reductions in the size of the U.S. military — it remains the opinion of many leading voices in government, academia and the veterans community that the economic, social and governance challenges associated with effectively meeting our national obligation to our veterans and their families will present a formidable challenge in the years and decades ahead (Berglass, 2010; Carter, 2013; Chandra et al., 2008; Wright, 2012a, 2012b). Importantly, the consequences associated with failing in our collective

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obligation to the nation’s veterans are high; such a failure will have adverse implications for the sustainability of an AVF<sup>2</sup> and thus our national security (Pincus, 2013). Additionally, failing to effectively, efficiently and meaningfully empower those who have shouldered the burden of the nation’s wars may precipitate social and economic challenges capable of overwhelming these supportive services for decades.

Thus, we contend that the second Obama administration, working in close collaboration with executive agencies, Congress, and the private sector, is well-positioned to act on a historic opportunity — capitalizing on both the foundations of policy and progress enacted over the past decade and the overwhelming public support for returning veterans and military families — to conceptualize (in doctrine)



and institutionalize (in policy) a National Veterans Strategy. More specifically, to:

- 1) Initiate dialogue and build toward broad consensus related to the foundational assumptions that define our collective obligation (today and in the future) to those who volunteer for military service;
- 2) Propose and formalize mechanisms to embed those assumptions into a “whole-of-government” strategic policy, practice and infrastructure (where appropriate) that engages and empowers the private sector, veteran service organizations and local communities; and
- 3) Develop and implement a forward-looking strategic planning process that informs veterans’ policy in a way that is efficient, effective and consistent with the assumptions that underlie the nation’s obligation to all those who have served.

### A NATIONAL VETERANS STRATEGY SUPPORTS THREE PRIMARY OBJECTIVES

First, a National Veterans Strategy represents a mechanism to harnesses citizen- and government-wide investment and engagement in the concerns of the nation’s veterans and military families. By design, the inclusion of a broad and formalized public dialogue on veteran issues — a necessary condition of a National Veterans Strategy — is an important and distinguishing feature from other strategic planning processes, which are largely exercises internal to the federal government. Emphasizing a national dialogue in this process publically renews the implicit social contract between American society and its veterans and military families. Moreover, robust connections between the American people, the military (including veterans and their families) and the government — the “paradoxical trinity” (Clausewitz, 2006, pp. 30-31) — are important factors to ensuring healthy civil-military relations and a



well-grounded grand strategy. Dialogue on these matters will remain critical as we enter an era marked by global uncertainty and diminishing societal ties to the armed forces.

Second, a National Veterans Strategy is positioned to foster sound, 21st century pub-

**“Military service will be socially regarded and institutionally supported – for years and decades to come – as our nation’s highest calling and ultimate expression of citizenship.”**

lic governance. Veterans’ policy is rapidly transforming into a “wicked problem” due to the broad scope and complexity of issues it aims to address. A National Veterans Strategy will likely better align the efforts and resources of myriad governmental, non-governmental and private stakeholders working in this policy space toward a common set of policy goals. Moreover, it will more fully institutionalize and strengthen administrative systems, interagency and public-private coordination and planning processes resulting in better-informed policy and program evaluation. Further, effective and efficient allocation of the tools, resources, responsibilities and authority to both inform and implement veterans’ policy and programs will promote more timely, efficient and high-quality outcomes for veterans and their families.

Finally, a National Veterans Strategy is fundamental to a sustainable national defense, namely the recruitment and preservation of a robust, all-volunteer military force. The all-volunteer military must continually attract the interest of diverse and talented Americans — representative of the diversity inherent in American society — to succeed in its security mission (DOD, 2012).<sup>3</sup> The efficacy of programs and supports related to the transition of service members to civilian life, and how those programs are perceived by future volunteers, represents an essential motivation for future military service. Establishing a national strategic planning process for veterans’ issues pays tribute to those who have served and concomitantly signals to future generations that military service will be socially regarded and institutionally supported — for years and decades to come — as our nation’s highest calling and ultimate expression of citizenship.

Given the potential advantages highlighted above, this report details the foundational logic supporting action toward articulating and institutionalizing a National Veterans Strategy. To that end, it is important at this point to highlight what this publication is not. It is not our purpose to:

- 1) Define what a National Veterans Strategy ‘is’ or should espouse with regard to policy or practice, or
- 2) Identify or prioritize the issue-based concerns that will presumably make up the practice focus of a National Veterans Strategy.

We contend that these important (and likely contentious) issues represent outcomes that will result from the process of carefully crafting and institutionalizing a National Veterans Strategy. Instead, our purpose is to offer a researched and logically developed “case for acting” on the imperative to develop a National Veterans Strategy — a strategy that is situated in both this nation’s social and cultural traditions and in the practical realities inherent in a contemporary social and economic environment.



In what follows, we begin by addressing the question: Why is now the time to act on a National Veterans Strategy? Building on what we perceive as an urgency for action, we then deconstruct the moral, social, economic, and security-based assumptions that should both motivate and inform the foundation of a National Veterans Strategy by highlighting the benefits conferred to veterans, government and other stakeholders that would likely result from this effort. We then offer a series of guiding questions that, based on our research, represent central issues to be addressed in the context of crafting a National Veterans Strategy. Finally, we conclude with a series of summary recommendations suggestive of a pathway to act on the insights suggested by this report.

## WHY NOW?

Many would ask: In light of the fact that the Obama administration and Congress jointly face a number of disparate and pressing economic, social, and national security challenges, why is now the time to act on a National Veterans Strategy?

First, the federal government's uncertain fiscal trajectory is forcing policymakers to confront difficult choices related to funding priorities, possibly including veterans' benefits and services (GAO, 2012a). Developing, articulating and institutionalizing a National Veterans Strategy may enable more focused and efficient use of increasingly constrained resources.

Consider that in 2013 the U.S. will direct an estimated \$140.3 billion to veteran-related programs and services (VA, 2012a). According to the Congressional Research Service (Scott, 2012), the VA budget authority last year (\$130B) was already more than double FY2000 levels (\$58.5B) and 14 times FY1940 levels (\$8.8B) in constant FY11 dollars. These increases are largely driven by rising health-care costs for an aging veteran population; an increasing number of beneficiaries eligible to receive veterans disability benefits (and the complexity of those claims); and increases in

the scope of income security, housing aid and education and training programs such as the Post 9/11 GI Bill. It is important to highlight that unplanned mandates have contributed significantly to increases in veterans-related spending and to the complexity and breadth of services and benefits administered by the VA.

Looking ahead, veterans' programs and benefits in the coming years will experience increased pressure from the nearly one mil-

**“According to the Congressional Research Service (Scott, 2012), the VA budget authority last year (\$130B) was already more than double FY2000 levels (\$58.5B) and 14 times FY1940 levels (\$8.8B) in constant FY11 dollars.”**

lion additional service members who are projected to leave the military by 2016 — adding to the over two million post-9/11 veterans that have already transitioned to civilian life.

From FY09 to FY11, the VA experienced a 29% rise in disability claims and has struggled keeping pace with this rise (GAO, 2012c). Moreover, post-9/11 veterans are filing for disability benefits at a higher rate than any generation before them (VA, 2012b, Marchione, 2012). The severity and complexity of many of the health and wellness challenges impacting the contemporary generation of veterans requires ongoing and increasingly advanced protocols of care and rehabilitative technologies. With this increased demand for veterans' benefits and services, the budget is estimated to climb another 18.5% by 2015, exceeding \$150 billion (Fraser, 2012). Harvard Professor Linda Bilmes (2011, p. 1) writes,

*“The history of previous wars shows that the cost of caring for war veterans rises for several decades and peaks in 30 to 40 years or more after a conflict. This will be especially true for veterans of the current wars. Veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan are utilizing VA medical services and applying for disability benefits at much higher rates than in previous wars.*

*Based on current patterns of benefit claims and medical usage, it is estimated that the total present value of such costs for Iraq and Afghanistan veterans over the next 40 years is in the range of \$600 billion to \$1 trillion.”*

In the face of resource constraints, if veterans' programs and benefits become vulnerable to future spending reductions, it is likely that a National Veterans Strategy would provide a more judicious and consensus-driven lens through which to consider possible reductions (as compared to the status quo). Within the framework of a National Veterans Strategy, proposed reductions would necessarily be considered in the context of the economic, moral-ethical and broader national geostrategic implications vis-à-vis America's obligation to its military veterans. A coherent policy planning framework will serve as a principled mechanism to rationalize future spending on veterans' benefits with broader, often competing, strategic goals. Moreover, since any future cuts would thus be justified according to national priorities, the framework will serve to limit their politicization in future budget debates.

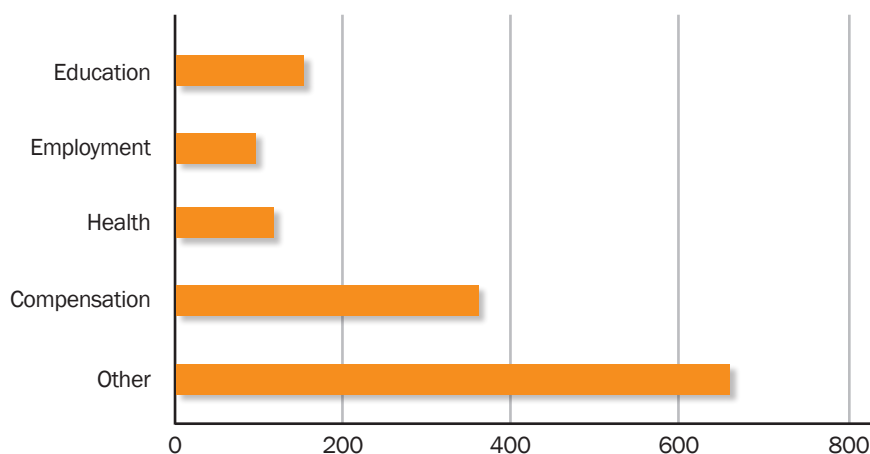
Second, the current institutional framework governing the scope of challenges affecting veterans remains far too disparate, reactive, and administratively marginalized, despite the best, well-intentioned efforts of myriad actors across the public and private sectors. To consider the institutional framework governing the scope of challenges affecting veterans, we identified and cataloged more than 1,300 Federal and State policies, Executive Orders, and agency directives that impact (directly or indirectly) veterans and/or their families, within a Policy Landscape Matrix (see Figures 1 & 2). While the current policy landscape engages almost every federal agency in some level of policy or programmatic responsibility for veterans issues, in many cases these policies — based on legislative intent, funding sources, or other bureaucratic issues — actually marginalize opportunities for interagency collaboration and efficient resource utilization. Extant policy is “crowding out” meaningful collab-

## A COMPLEX POLICY LANDSCAPE

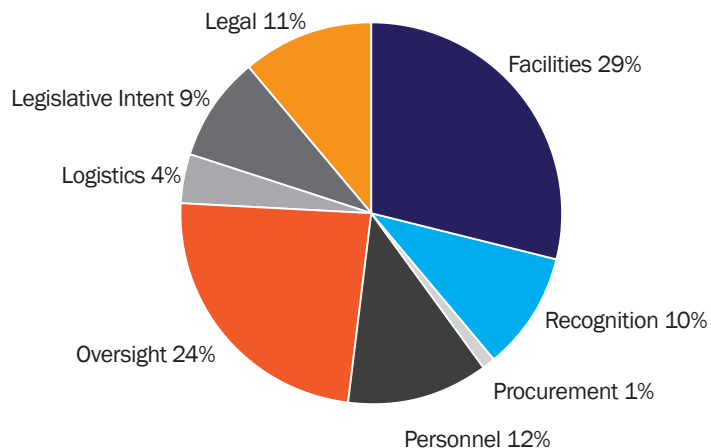
To inform this publication, our research team identified and cataloged more than 1,300 Federal and State policies, Executive Orders, and agency directives that impact (directly or indirectly) veterans and/or their families, within a Policy Landscape Matrix.

The scope of this effort spans the period between 1997 (105th Congress), and continues through 2011 (112th Congress). Each policy was catalogued based on 11 criteria, to include level of government, name, effective date, reference, source, term, lead entity, other entity, category, impact area and beneficiary. Additionally, each policy was categorized by overarching theme (to summarize the policy objective) to include: Education, Employment, Health, Compensation and Other. While our categorization methodology focused on identifying – within the universe of all veteran-related policies – those that specifically impact the major, post-service concerns of veterans (Education, Employment, Health and Compensation), the overwhelming majority of veteran-focused policies focused on “Other” themes and objectives. Figure 1 below decomposes the distribution of policy objectives represented by the landscape of veterans’ policy as based on our review. To further define the “Other” category, additional analysis was performed to capture the underlying purpose of these policies, as depicted in Figure 2 below.

**Figure 1: Policy ‘Category’ Summary**



**Figure 2: ‘Other’ Veterans’ Policies**



oration by marginalizing the opportunity to allocate inherently constrained resources to their first, best use.

For example, the policy landscape analysis highlights many examples of redun-

**“Extant policy is ‘crowding out’ meaningful collaboration by marginalizing the opportunity to allocate inherently constrained resources to their first, best use.”**

dant effort, overlapping responsibility and underutilized programming and resources across federal agencies and between federal and state governments. While it is not our purpose to deconstruct the universe of these policy-specific examples in this report, we observe that some include responsibility overlap, duplicative resource allocation, and poor coordination between the departments of Labor, Veterans Affairs and Defense related to veteran employment and training programs (GAO, 2012b). The VA and Medicare were also found to have made \$13 billion in duplicative payments to providers of veterans health-care services (Trivedi, et al., 2012). Without a unifying framework that logically informs the goals and objectives to be realized as a consequence of a public investment in veterans, it becomes exceedingly difficult to evaluate the return on the public investment in veteran-focused programs and services (Berglass, 2012).

Third, there is considerable public goodwill toward veterans and military families today. Between July 2001 and August 2012, there was a 181% increase in the number of registered veteran support nonprofit organizations filing a Form 990 with the Internal Revenue Service, with a corresponding increase of \$2.9 trillion in reported total assets (National Center for Charitable Statistics).<sup>4</sup> It is reasonable and prudent to assume, however, that the salience of veteran-focused concerns will decline in the public consciousness as the nation moves further from a decade at war. The community of stake-

holders impacted by the concerns of veterans and their families has a unique — but fleeting — opportunity to marshal this extant public support and build consensus around a common and enduring vision related to the community reintegration and post-service life course support available to our veterans. A comprehensive National Veterans Strategy, inclusive of non-governmental and private-sector stakeholders, will help to more smartly align and focus public and private sector resources toward these goals (Berglass, 2012).

Fourth, data-driven scholarship that informs veterans' policy is central to principled policy formulation, implementation and evaluation — especially in the face of an increasingly complex universe of economic, social, and policy challenges impacting veterans and military families. This scholarship, consequently, demands an interdisciplinary perspective to draw upon and integrate important intellectual contributions from multiple academic disciplines and fields of practice. Such a level of coordinated, interdisciplinary scholarship aimed at accumulating policy-relevant and actionable knowledge on veterans' issues does not presently exist (Carter, 2012, pp. 24-25). If the process includes robust public engagement, a National Veterans Strategy should help cultivate, unite and organize an interdisciplinary field of veteran policy studies that supports more principled veteran policymaking.

Fifth, the maturation and institutionalization of the AVF has created a situation where a shared burden for national defense is an artifact of the past; as such, increasingly fewer members of our society have any tangible connection to the military (Pew, 2011a). Naturally, there will always be some distance between military and societal norms and values. This distance is evident in the fact that today, both veterans and non-veterans agree that the American public does not fully understand the complex challenges facing the nation's veterans and military families (Pew, 2011b). Managing this divide requires carefully balancing the inherent tensions between the military's functional purpose of

maintaining a distinct ethos and set of values necessary to provide effective security, while at the same time ensuring this effort remains sensibly responsive to, and culturally integrated with, American society (Burk, 2001). Assuming the all-volunteer policy will endure given its resilience over the past four decades, an ongoing public dialogue is absolutely necessary to continually bridge these evolving cultural differences (Gronke & Feaver, 2001, p. 161) and to mitigate the perceived alienation resulting from the larger social forces at work today (Demers, 2011). Whether the civil-military gap widens or converges in the years ahead, a National Veterans Strategy will institutionalize a three-way dialogue between the public, the military, and the government, thereby reinforcing stable civil-military relations in the long-term through increased opportunity for public participation (Clausewitz, 2006, pp. 30-31; Huntington, 2006, pp. 78-92).

**“A National Veterans Strategy is both symbolic and instrumental with regard to affirming America's enduring obligation to those who have served, and will serve in the future.”**

Finally, national security experts envision the future force as smaller, more technologically-advanced, capable of working with global partners and operating in austere and, at times, high-profile circumstances (DOD, 2012). This global security environment demands a future force composed of our nation's most skilled, qualified and service-minded individuals — those bright, assertive middle and high school students carefully attuned to the media and keenly aware of issues impacting those who volunteer for military service (Humensky, Jordan, Stroupe, & Hynes, 2013).<sup>5</sup> As a self-selective institution, the AVF is increasingly comprised of members who have had former family ties to the military (Pew, 2011a). Importantly, the past decade at war is the first extended test of the all-volunteer model since its inception in

1973. Thus, we have yet to fully understand the implications of the model as related to the social contract between those who volunteer and those who do not. We know from examples of European nations — such as the Netherlands, France, Sweden, and especially the United Kingdom (nations which have maintained a long tradition of all-volunteer service) — that post-service policies and practices impacting military veterans have a direct impact on future recruiting and retention (Dandeker, Wessely, Iversen, & Ross, 2006). Importantly, we know from those examples that over time, an all-volunteer service model cultivates distance and erodes the social contract between those who serve and those who benefit from the military service of others (Dandeker, et al., 2006). Many would suggest the beginnings of a similar trend in the U.S.; a recent Pew Research Center poll indicates that only 48% of Americans would recommend military service to a young person. Further, while 83% of those surveyed acknowledge that military members and their families have had to make significant sacrifices since 9/11, seven in ten of those who acknowledged this burden attributed this sacrifice to simply “part of being in the military” (Pew, 2011b, p. 60). Moreover, only 12% of Americans feel the public understands the benefits and rewards of military service well or fairly well (2011b, p. 64). In the end, a National Veterans Strategy is central to affirming America's enduring obligation to those who have served and will serve in the future.

For these reasons, we suggest a National Veterans Strategy facilitates the opportunity to re-craft the existing institutional framework that governs and executes veterans' policy, in a way that promotes sound, economical public governance; stable civil-military relations; and a strong, sustainable national defense. It is abundantly clear that action now toward crafting and implementing a National Veterans Strategy would confer great benefit not only to veterans and their families but to all Americans.



**“Only when we coordinate and collaborate across the public and private sector, can we hope to provide a continuum of support for our veterans, especially for our wounded. We have to start thinking in terms of a 50-year, nationwide, coordinated plan. Until we have a National Veterans Strategy to help coordinate all efforts, we will be giving our veterans less than they’ve earned on the field of battle.”**

—Jim Knotts  
Chief Executive Officer  
Operation Homefront

## A National Strategy: The Foundational Assumptions

A National Veterans Strategy is necessary to serve three central purposes: 1) to harness and sustain citizen and government-wide investment in the concerns affecting veterans and military families; 2) promote 21st century public governance of veterans’ issues; and 3) contribute to a stronger, sustainable national defense. Importantly, each of these purposes is grounded in a set of closely-held assumptions and attitudes about American citizenship, fairness, military service and civil-military relations. Accordingly, to articulate a fully-developed logic supporting a National Veterans Strategy — logic intended as a foundation for policy advancement and administrative action — it is important to consider and deconstruct the foundational assumptions embedded within the broader intent of a National Veterans Strategy. The assumptions identified below reflect a number of significant normative choices to be made within a strategic planning process. They are not intended to represent the full set of possible assumptions.

### **CITIZEN AND GOVERNMENT-WIDE INVESTMENT IN VETERANS AFFAIRS**

The supports and benefits afforded to veterans in return for their service are a direct reflection of the extent to which military service is valued by society. This support reveals norms of citizenship and justice in the context of additional rights and privileges granted to military veterans. Determining a fair and reasonable level of post-service supports demands both national leadership and broad civic engagement. A National Veterans Strategy establishes a deliberative, democratic process that fosters national dialogue and builds broad citizen and government-

wide engagement in veterans’ policy. As a consequence, it holds the added potential of helping to repair a pervasive citizenship deficit across the nation (Nabatchi, 2010). Importantly, this premise assumes:

#### **ASSUMPTION #1**

*The social contract between American society and its veterans is inviolate, enduring and must be continuously upheld.*

**AND**

#### **ASSUMPTION #2**

*The social contract between American society and its veterans, by extension, confers a societal obligation to support the families of those who serve.*

The notion that cultivating civic and governmental engagement in veterans’ issues is important assumes an enduring moral obligation to veterans. In other words, President Lincoln’s pledge “to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan” is an eternal promise that holds for present and future generations.

Indeed, America’s legacy of caring for its veterans dates back to the late 17th century at Plymouth Colony, which provided pensions to veterans disabled while protecting the colony (VA, n.d., p. 3). Immediately following the American Revolution, the general public sentiment reflected an ideological distrust of a standing army and the belief that the American Revolution was a people’s war shouldered by the whole of society (Resch, 1999, p. 2). However, it was the 1818 Pension Act that institutionalized the persistent and transformative image of the suffering soldier as a symbol of American patriotism and citizenship and subsequently legitimized the Continental Army (1999, pp. 4-5). This

enactment of law and creation of a new pension regime as a gesture of national gratitude cemented “the nation’s celebratory rites of self-affirmation and renewal” and “established a new way to bind [future] generations” (p. 201).

Beyond American heritage and tradition, the very act of maintaining a force of volunteers to preserve the existing democratic order (e.g., “to defend the Constitution against foreign enemies and domestic”) carries with it certain moral obligations. At least four obligations are germane to the claim that America’s social contract is inviolate and enduring.

First, because our military acts on behalf of a democratic society to apply force, the applied force must necessarily be limited to minimize human rights violations and remain consistent with society’s democratic values (Burk, 2005). This assumption implies a direct connection and moral obligation between a society and its military personnel, specifically that military personnel are sufficiently imbued with and committed to acting within these values.

Second, and by extension, the respect and dignity of our soldiers and veterans must be maintained since they are our agents, citizens, and “ends in themselves” (Burk, 2005, p. 162) who we subject to moral risks in the management of violence and repeated “choice[s] between lesser evils” (Burk, p. 159; Brock and Lettini, 2010).

Third, the AVF model necessarily means that military family members are both serving and sacrificing, as an inherent consequence of a family member’s decision to serve in uniform. We often talk of the sacrifices made by military families as being altruistic and benevolent, whereas in reality these sacrifices are a necessary condition of sustaining the efficacy of the AVF.

Finally, the enduring, intergenerational nature of America’s social contract with its veterans and military families is rooted in a natural, civic duty to create and uphold just institutions toward the improvement of civilization (Rawls, 1971, p. 293). Additionally, generations must not only maintain these institutions but also “put aside in each period of time a suitable amount of real capital accumulation” according to a “just savings principle” appropriate to the present state of

**“We often talk of the sacrifices made by military families as being altruistic and benevolent, whereas in reality these sacrifices are a necessary condition of sustaining the efficacy of the AVF.”**

society (pp. 285, 287). Creating a National Veterans Strategy is thus a morally justified act that supports our nation’s capacity to maintain our promise to current and future generations of veterans and military families.

It is important to note that while history and convention assume a social contract between the nation and its veterans, the nature of that contract (regarding rights, benefits, and honoraria) has evolved — and presumably will continue to evolve — over time as a function of social, economic and political norms and constraints. Consequently, though we assume the social contract between American society and its veterans is inviolate, enduring and something to be upheld, we make no assumption with regard to the nature or degree of the rights, benefits, or honoraria conferred to veterans as a means to honor this contract.

### **ASSUMPTION #3**

*While veterans are honored in American society today, this social distinction is neither a historical constant, nor is it assured for future generations.*

Regardless of attitudes about the recent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, public sentiment for and pride in the military and its veterans is at an all-time high (Pew, 2011b, p. 60). The American public has demonstrated an outpouring of support and generosity for veterans. In addition to the recent expansion of veterans’ benefits by Congress, supporting veterans and military families, particularly their successful transition to the civilian workforce, remains a top priority of the Obama administration and the Joining Forces initiative. The VA is undergoing a transformation to better serve the needs of a more diverse veteran population including a greater focus on female veterans. A new ecosystem of nonprofit organizations working to address the concerns of veterans and their families, and an expanding veterans’ policy and research community, has emerged over the past decade.

Veterans clearly enjoy a special status in American society today, unlike Vietnam War veterans who preceded them. But as previous experience shows, this confidence may be superficial and may not last indefinitely (Gronke & Feaver, 2001). Accordingly, the current “sea of goodwill” (Berglass, 2012; Copeland & Sutherland, 2010; Mullen, 2008) gives ample prospect to institutionalize a policymaking process that ensures constructive debate and civil-military dialogue on veterans’ issues whether or not rougher waters lie ahead.

To some degree, establishing a national strategy will proactively seize an opportunity to prevent future injustices like those experienced by our Vietnam generation. Its establishment is a moral argument for

protecting future volunteers from evolving popular opinion and politics over the role and use of the armed forces abroad. Should declining public opinion and legitimacy in the armed forces ever reach a point of crisis, a National Veterans Strategy will help to better disentangle and constructively channel often intertwined debates over military and veterans' policy.

## 21ST CENTURY PUBLIC GOVERNANCE OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

Caring for veterans and military families has evolved into a complex public service. To sustain and continuously improve the efficient and effective delivery of these services demands a “whole-of-government” vision that transcends any individual agency and which engages civil society.

### ASSUMPTION #4

*The existing institutional arrangement governing veterans' policy is not adequately informed or coordinated by a coherent “whole-of-government” policy or optimally integrated with private-sector efforts.*

Both the scope of veterans' policy and the number of governmental, public and private actors operating in this space is expansive. Veterans' policy covers issues of urgent and critical concern, including (but not limited to) veteran suicide, education, post-traumatic stress (PTS), homelessness and unemployment (Carter, 2012). It includes other medium- and long-term areas related to benefits, disability claims (including both VA and SSA) and access to healthcare (2012). Likewise, the institutional arrangement of veteran-related regulations and programs is multi-level and multi-sector, involving numerous federal agencies, state and local governments, and private and nonprofit stakeholders in civil society.

In complex fields such as veterans' policy, major institutional reforms would likely be slow, inefficient, or worse, counterproductive to the overall intent of caring

for veterans and military families during a critical postwar transition period. Despite redundancies highlighted above, centralization of some programs or services may be suboptimal since certain agencies have niche strengths and comparative advantages over others. For example, in comparison to the rest of the federal government, the departments of Labor and Commerce have the greatest institutional capacity for addressing broad unemployment. Yet, tackling unemployment of a more targeted population, such as veterans, requires robust coordination with the VA, DoD, the Chamber of Commerce, state governments, the private sector and other stakeholders.

Successful interagency coordination and cooperation is typically governed by:

*“a detailed, clearly defined strategy; a commitment to shared objectives and clear targets informed by an overarching strategic vision; a transparency of operations; and strategic interests being given priority over local or sectional interests” (McQuaid, 2010, p. 139).*

Strategic planning, which generally outlines how resources (means) will be used (ways) to achieve stated goals (ends), is especially critical in complex policy areas requiring collaborative governance arrangements and broad multi-sector participation. Yet, no comprehensive interagency planning process presently exists that adequately governs the veterans' policy space — one that clearly defines a national strategic vision for veterans' policy; identifies short-, medium-, and long-term planning goals across the federal government; and establishes formal coordination mechanisms to drive effective policy coordination and execution.

The current role of the VA is to act as a service-delivery and implementing agency — not a driver of federal policy or national strategy. While the VA maintains a forward-looking strategic plan outlining its departmental vision, transformational goals, and planned initiatives through the year 2015, many of its major initiatives

are simply unattainable without robust integration with other governmental, non-governmental, and community-based partners. Likewise, while it retains ultimate responsibility for veterans' policy, the VA has no authority (nor does any other federal agency) to establish or oversee mechanisms necessary to drive cross-governmental and public-private coordination on veterans' services and programs.

### ASSUMPTION #5

*Changes to the rights, benefits, and services that represent societal means of satisfying the social contract between the nation and those who serve should be principled, rational and coordinated.*

Rising federal debt and statutory entitlement program costs (social security, healthcare) are placing substantial pressure on discretionary programs — including veterans' affairs. Despite an inviolate and enduring obligation to veterans and military families (Assumption #1), the reality of finite resources and the nation's long-term fiscal health demand certain limitations and prioritizations. If future reductions in funding for veterans benefits or service are ever considered, making these tough choices within the framework of a National Veterans Strategy will give them justified and rationalized importance, rather than leaving them to unproductive partisan debate or ad hoc, incremental outcomes.

Additionally, if the quality and level of veterans benefits are to be maximized despite leaner budgets, federal, state, and local governments and private and non-profit sector partners must continue to gain efficiencies through coordination and collaboration driven by a common strategic vision. Improved veteran transition to civilian life will help mitigate rising healthcare and benefit costs, not only across the federal government, but also at the state level for unemployment, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), civilian healthcare, and other related costs (i.e., criminal system



involvement, substance abuse, domestic violence, or others).

## A SUSTAINABLE NATIONAL DEFENSE

National security is paramount for survival and thus societies must be able to raise and maintain defense forces as necessary. The way a nation recruits its armed forces significantly impacts the relationship between its military and society because it connects the individual citizen to the nation's defense (Micewski, 2006, p. 209).

Over the last 40 years, there has been much debate over the benefits and drawbacks of conscript- and volunteer-based recruiting models, especially their respective compatibility with democratic values and civic participation (Abrams & Bacevich, 2001; Cohen, 2001). This debate continues even today (Cancian, 2011; Gilroy, 2010; Yingling, 2010). Though there were occasional challenges, the AVF has been tested and proven largely successful (Bailey, 2009; CBO, 2007; Oi, 2003; Rostker, 2006; Warner & Asch, 2001). Since 1973, the AVF has not threatened our democracy nor has it created a military social caste (Micewski, 2006, p. 213), despite well-documented civil-military cultural and attitudinal differences (e.g., “the gap”) (Feaver & Kohn, 2001). However, the AVF remains highly dependent upon a continuous supply of highly-skilled and educated recruits imbued with democratic ideals. This recruiting pool is highly sensitive to economic inducements (including veterans' benefits) and economic trends (Simon & Warner, 2007). Thus, our premise that a National Veterans Strategy is positioned to cultivate and nurture a sustainable national defense is based on:

### ASSUMPTION #6

*A positive social perception of military service positively serves the AVF imperative of recruiting a high-quality and socio-economically representative force.*

AND

### ASSUMPTION #7

*Efforts to support the post-service welfare of those who volunteer for service positively serves the AVF imperative of recruiting a high-quality and socio-economically representative force.*

The late Gen. Norman Schwarzkopf was straightforward about the AVF: “[P]eople don’t join the military to do poorly...they say, ‘I think I’ll enlist in the Army because I want to do better’” (Schwarzkopf, 1991). America’s sons and daughters who voluntarily choose military service are motivated by positive beliefs — a “sense of self-esteem and moral value” (Janowitz, 1971, p. 440) — in military service, economic incentives or a combination of the two. Fundamental values of honor, patriotism, family tradition and civic obligation motivate military service. Gainful employment, advanced training and education, and general upward economic mobility do so as well. Just as important, the successes of the military itself, alongside visible examples of successful veterans, shape public attitudes that, in turn, strengthen positive beliefs in and decisions about military service.

In the absence of the draft, neither core beliefs, nor incentives, nor public favor in military service are alone sufficient to sustain the AVF. Rather, these influences are jointly reinforcing. Effective citizenship and military integration with society is difficult for any modern democracy, and it must be nurtured (Janowitz, 1983). Postmodern ideals in Western Europe serve as a caution to the U.S. with respect to the AVF. There, “individualism has taken a toll on citizenship, and while there is no shortage of volunteer associations assuming a variety of socially useful roles, few volunteers relish the thought of serving as part of a bureaucratic state organization,” including the military (Boene, 2003, p. 175).

Fortunately for now, the sense of duty still outpolls other reasons for choosing to serve, despite arguments suggesting that today’s service members primarily hold economic motivations (Krebs, 2009, p. 165).

However, Morris Janowitz’s claim still holds that, “in the long run, it is doubtful whether the military establishment, like other public agencies, could maintain its organizational effectiveness merely by raising monetary rewards...[since] the incentive system would not necessarily produce the required perspectives and professional commitments” (1971, p. 422).

If not continuously nurtured by a society that values military service as a respected profession and expression of citizenship, the military will increasingly attract volunteers motivated purely for economic gain from increasingly narrower socio-economic segments of our society. The ultimate danger here (the primary fear and criticism of the AVF) is that an unrepresentative military evolves into a political pressure group, creating a crisis in American civil-military relations and threatening the liberal democratic order. Policies that harness public support for transitioning veterans (without victimizing them) reinforce positive societal beliefs about military service. A positive societal view of military service is thus important to encourage broader socio-economic representation in the AVF.

Most importantly, the benefits and supports that veterans receive tie directly to all three support systems described above. First, they provide additional economic incentives to serve. Second, they symbolically honor veterans and military families for their sacrifices, thus reinforcing individual values of patriotism and civic duty. Third, they reinforce and sustain positive societal values toward military service through reaffirming their obligations. A National Veterans Strategy will add significant value along each of these lines, thereby enhancing the overall recruiting and retention climate for the AVF and enabling a sustainable and strong national defense.

# Building Consensus and Process: Guiding Questions

Perhaps the most pressing challenge in American public administration today is managing the inherent tension between providing efficient, responsive governance and retaining the strategic agility (grand-strategic and inter-departmental) to rapidly adapt in an increasingly dynamic, uncertain world. Building and sustaining consensus around a common vision — both within agencies and across the federal government — is absolutely essential in successful strategy-making (Trubowitz, Goldman, & Rhodes, 1999). Yet, in our federal system, power is purposely divided, values and interests are many and institutional change is incremental, which only complicates this task.

The preceding section identified seven major assumptions that ground the central arguments supporting a National Veterans Strategy. It is our contention that these assumptions inform the conceptual foundations of a “whole-of-government” effort, executed in partnership with the private sector and other stakeholders to veterans’ affairs, to articulate and institutionalize a National Veterans Strategy. In what follows, we offer a series of guiding questions that suggest a deliberative process to either challenge or affirm the foundational assumptions identified above. Specifically, these questions are offered as a means to:

- 1) Constructively frame a debate on veterans’ issues toward the development of reasoned, popularly supported policy goals; and
- 2) Serve as an initial framework from which to craft an increasingly robust model of engagement related to the strategic planning process — rules, incentives, oversight mechanisms and coordination of resources aimed at efficient and effective policy implementation.

**“Building and sustaining consensus around a common vision – both within agencies and across the federal government – is absolutely essential in successful strategy-making.”**

1

## Who should be involved in a strategic conversation and planning process impacting veterans’ policy?

- ▶ Federal government stakeholders?
- ▶ State and local government stakeholders?
- ▶ Non-profit, academic, and private sector stakeholders?
- ▶ The general public?

2

## Why do we, as Americans, care for our veterans?

- ▶ How have our history and traditions influenced these values?
- ▶ What are the moral/ethical considerations?
- ▶ What are the economic considerations?
- ▶ What are the security implications?

3

## Who is an American veteran?

- ▶ Should the term be all-inclusive or exclusive?
- ▶ Who deserves support within this definition? Are family members included in this definition? If not, why? If so, which family members and to what extent?
- ▶ Is this definition immutable over time (total war vs. limited war vs. peacetime)?
- ▶ How does the type of military force (all-volunteer vs. citizen-soldier vs. mixed) influence our definition of a veteran?

4

#### What recognition, entitlements and other services ought the nation provide its veterans and military families?

- ▶ What is (are) the primary goal(s) of veteran transition?
- ▶ How do these goals support democratic values and Constitutional rights?
- ▶ How do these goals support the National Security Strategy and related strategic planning documents?
- ▶ Is the intent of veteran transition restorative or progressive? Why?
- ▶ What are fair and just rewards (symbolic and material) for military service?
- ▶ What breadth/scope of benefits and services is necessary to achieve these goals?

5

#### What can the nation reasonably afford to provide its veterans?

- ▶ What can the nation afford? What are the limits on veterans' benefits?
- ▶ At what point does increasing benefits create an entitlement culture in the military and negatively impact the quality and character of the AVF?
- ▶ In a constrained fiscal climate, what is the priority of benefits and services?
- ▶ What are the eligibility criteria for benefits and services? Time in/character of service? Combat/non-combat service? Injuries suffered? Financial need?

6

#### How (and by who) should these benefits and services be delivered?

- ▶ The Tools of Government: Direct government? Government-sponsored enterprises? Public-private networks? Private sector/contracts? Grants/Loans/Vouchers? Combinations?
- ▶ How will the VA's internal strategic plan fit within and support a broader National Veterans Strategy?
- ▶ Which benefits and services fall outside the VA's purview? To what extent and why?
- ▶ What are the current administrative authorities and division of labor? What integration and/or performance deficiencies need addressing?
- ▶ What are the trade-offs and transaction costs of reform (i.e., administrative and program consolidation vs. new institutions to force/promote coordination)?
- ▶ Is there a need for specific 'micro-strategies' on cross-cutting issues (i.e., post-traumatic stress, suicides, homelessness)?

**“This report is an important contribution to the growing canon of literature in support of a National Veterans Strategy and should help advance the national conversation toward actionable plans for policy change.”**

— Nancy Berglass  
Director, the Iraq Afghanistan  
Deployment Impact Fund  
Senior Fellow, Center for a  
New American Security

**“We need bold and thoughtful strategies this year to address the challenges facing veterans and military families because the public’s attention will soon turn away from us. I applaud the concept of a National Veterans Strategy and encourage policymakers to give these recommendations serious attention.”**

— Kathy Roth-Douquet  
Chief Executive Officer  
Blue Star Families



**“Fewer and fewer Americans serve in the military and sacrifice in the nation’s wars. This proposal recommends a thoughtful and imaginative process to begin to institutionalize and secure our responsibility to them and their families and to meet this national obligation more efficiently, more effectively, and more transparently. Doing this should be a matter of high national priority.”**

—James Wright  
President Emeritus &  
Eleazar Wheelock Professor of History  
Dartmouth College

## Summary Recommendations

**T**his paper provides the conceptual foundation and justification for a National Veterans Strategy. We maintain that the second Obama administration — in close partnership with Congress, state and local governments, veteran support organizations, and the private sector — is well-positioned to act on the opportunity detailed in this publication and by doing so confer to veterans, their families and to all Americans important social, economic and security advantages.

Policymaking impacting veterans and their families need not — and certainly ought not — be adversarial. Undoubtedly, the veterans’ policy space is incredibly broad and complex. It is unreasonable to expect that one single federal agency, with sufficient organization and resources, is the panacea to the challenges facing transitioning veterans and military families. Veterans’ policy is a societal obligation. Accordingly, instead of being viewed as “institutional turf” to defend, annex, or avoid altogether, veterans’ policy should be viewed as a shared responsibility and be governed collaboratively to the greatest extent possible.

Surely, all the hard work in translating concepts and policies to effective practice and good governance lies ahead. Successful collaborative governance is not only difficult to create but even more challenging to sustain given the multi-level leadership necessary to align structures, processes, and accountabilities over time (Bryson, Crosby & Stone, 2006). But given the overwhelming public support for veterans and military families, combined with progress and momentum gained from recent policy developments, now is the time to act.

We conclude by offering six initial recommendations to the Obama administration and Congress to consider in initiating a National Veterans Strategy.

### RECOMMENDATION

*Create a presidentially-directed Veterans’ Public Engagement and Collaborative Governance Commission, responsible for engaging a broad base of stakeholders in a dialogue on veterans’ issues.*

The president should direct the establishment of a Veterans’ Public Engagement and Collaborative Governance Commission, compliant with the Federal Advisory Committee Act (1972), to: 1) solicit public and private sector input and participation in the development of national veterans’ policy; and 2) to make recommendations on a national and “whole-of-government” approach to align government, public, and private sector veteran programs and initiatives under a common set of goals and principles.

Veterans policy demands a collaborative governance approach — an “arrangement where one or more public agencies directly engage [private] stakeholders in a collective decision-making process that is formal, consensus-oriented and deliberative, and that aims to make or implement public policy or manage public programs or assets” (Ansell & Gash, 2008, p. 544). Membership of this commission would thus be intentionally broad and inclusive. Still, it is imperative that this body report directly to the president, similar to the President’s Intelligence Advisory Board, to ensure the necessary reach and authority to motivate action and to sustain executive ownership of the process.

This body should first solicit stakeholder input through a structured nationwide dialogue. This dialogue could be accomplished through a series of meetings across the country, leading up to a national conference or summit. Toward this end, the Commission might also consider collaborating with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and soliciting recommendations and lessons learned in public engagement with state and local government and private sector stakeholders. In fact, DHS recently implemented a similar model described above to encourage state, local and private sector participation in a national dialogue on homeland security policy (DHS, 2012b, pp. D-1, D-2). Moreover, many important lessons from successful community-level collaboration between VA facilities, federal, state and local veterans’ programs, and the public and private sector organizations will be invaluable to collect and draw upon throughout this process.

## RECOMMENDATION

*Establish a single point of authority (directive and budgetary), responsible for coordinating and directing the execution of a National Veterans Strategy.*

The president should appoint and delegate the necessary authority to a single federal entity to lead and oversee the execution of an interagency strategy that clearly defines a national vision for veterans' policy; identifies short-, medium-, and long-term planning goals across the federal government; establishes formal coordination mechanisms to drive effective policy coordination and execution; and promotes transparency, accountability and maximum public and private sector participation. This single authority would also assume responsibility to purposefully align the National Veterans Strategy within the broader National Security Strategy planning framework. Importantly, the Congressional oversight structure for this authority should be considered carefully. Subjecting this point of authority to a multitude of oversight committees may be overly burdensome or self-defeating toward the end of improving effective and efficiency interagency coordination.

## RECOMMENDATION

*Establish an Interagency Policy Committee on Veterans, responsible for crafting a National Veterans Strategy.*

In parallel with the Veterans' Public Engagement and Collaborative Governance Commission, the president should create an interagency policy committee on veterans responsible for developing an enduring and comprehensive National Veterans Strategy. This committee would coordinate directly with the Domestic Policy Council and National Security Staff and fall within the existing framework for interagency planning and presidential action.<sup>6</sup> At the outset, this body should assess the critical preconditions to successful collaborative governance (e.g., history of institutional conflict and cooperation, participation incentives, power and resource imbalances, leadership, institutional design) and the feasibility of designing

and integrating into the process itself tailored approaches to increase direct dialogue, trust, and the development of commitment and shared understanding across government and the private sector (Ansell & Gash, 2008).

Drawing upon the findings and recommendations from the Public Engagement Commission, this committee should specifically focus on: areas of inefficient service delivery and performance; gaps in and barriers to interagency coordination and information sharing (both institutional and regulatory); opportunities for governance innovation, particularly in leveraging technology and other Web 2.0 tools to increase both interagency and public-private coordination; and recommended reform initiatives to incorporate within the National Veterans Strategy implementation process.

## RECOMMENDATION

*Establish a standing National Veterans Advisory Board, responsible for providing strategic advice and counsel to the president, Congress and implementing agencies related to veteran's policy.*

As previously recommended (Berglass, 2010; Carter, 2012), the president should formally establish a National Veterans Advisory Board. Ideally, this board would be born out of the initial public engagement commission, report to the president, and be comprised of key leaders and experts from partnering federal agencies, state and local government, veteran support nonprofit organizations, the private sector, and academia. This body will provide long-term objective advice and recommendations to the president, Congress, VA Secretary, and partner agencies on matters of strategic importance to veterans' policy. Its initial charge would be to support the VA Secretary and Interagency Policy Committee on Veterans in developing courses of action to implement a strategic interagency planning process for veterans' affairs policy. It would assume a long-term public engagement and governance role taken on by the initial commission while helping to lead and strengthen

an emerging policy and research community on veterans' issues (Carter, 2012, pp. 24-25). Finally, this board would also collaborate with the Veterans Health Administration's Office of Research and Development.

## RECOMMENDATION

*Create and institutionalize a forward-looking, periodic review process designed to assess evolving veterans' policy and programs across the federal government.*

Finally, Congress should mandate the establishment of a forward-looking, periodic review process to continuously assess veterans' policy and programs across the federal government. This review process serves the purpose of evaluating veteran and military family needs, long-term veterans' policy goals, interagency coordination and alignment, capabilities and resources, and of ensuring government transparency and propriety. While this process would closely mirror and complement the Quadrennial Defense Review, it should be independently led by the sole authority appointed to direct the execution of the National Veterans Strategy, per prior recommendation.

## RECOMMENDATION

*Congress should create a voluntary coalition of veteran-serving organizations, philanthropic associations, and other private sector stakeholders, responsible for cultivating and formalizing a model of collaborative engagement (public-private, private-private and national-state-community) that best aligns the resources of government, corporate, foundation and community partners in support of veterans and their families.*

Veterans and military families are faced with a large and increasing number of entities serving their needs. This complex web of supportive services and resources creates both a distinct challenge for veterans and family members to navigate and a broader problem of effectively and efficiently matching services to the

**“To demonstrate that we honor and respect our military veterans, our nation should engage the brightest minds in the public and private sectors to work together to establish a national veterans strategy. The time to do this is now.”**

— Steve Robinson  
U.S. Army Veteran  
Leading Veterans Advocate

needs of the population. Further, legal barriers currently obstruct opportunities for meaningful collaboration between the public and private sector, inhibiting the optimal utilization of corporate, foundation, and community-based resources alongside government provided support for veterans and military families.

Accordingly, Congress should create a voluntary coalition of veteran-serving organizations, philanthropic associations and other private sector stakeholders, responsible for cultivating and formalizing a model of collaborative engagement (public-private, private-private, and national-state-community) that best aligns their collective efforts and resources. This coalition could be created as a “government corporation” and be charged with providing a means of internal and cross-sector communication and coordination.

Additionally, this coalition would identify best practices and guiding principles for collaborative engagement related to programs and services for veteran and military families. Improved public-private engagement will strengthen relationships across all sectors, allowing all stakeholders to use their valuable resources to greater effect and further support the intended purpose of the National Veterans Strategy.

## CONCLUSION

An extensive and ongoing review of both public and private sector policy and programming motivated our purpose: to suggest a researched and logically-developed case for action toward a coordinated and consensus-driven National Veterans Strategy.

In this report, we have detailed a logic supporting such action, grounded in both this nation’s social and cultural traditions and situated in the practical realities characteristic of the contemporary economic and security environment.

The central finding of this report is that coordinated “whole-of-government” action focused toward crafting and institutionalizing a National Veterans Strategy is necessary to serve important economic, social and security objectives for the nation in a way that is consistent with the inherent social contract that defines the relationship between America and its veterans.



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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>As of January 2012, veteran homelessness was estimated at 62,619, a 7.2% reduction from the previous year.

<sup>2</sup>All references to the all-volunteer force include Active duty, National Guard, and Reserve forces.

<sup>3</sup>DoD has ten primary mission areas: Counterterrorism and Irregular Warfare; Deter and Defeat Aggression; Project Power Despite Anti-Access/Area Denial Challenges; Counter Weapons of Mass Destruction; Operate Effectively in Cyberspace and Space; Maintain a Safe, Secure and Effective Nuclear Deterrent; Defend the Homeland and Provide Support to Civil Authorities; Provide a Stabilizing Presence; Conduct Stability and Counterinsurgency Operations; Conduct Humanitarian, Disaster Relief, and Other Operations.

<sup>4</sup>In July 2001, 11,612 registered veteran support nonprofits filed 990s, reporting \$6.208 trillion in assets. In Aug 2012, these figured were 32,850 and \$9.150 trillion. This data was drawn from the National Center for Charitable Statistics by using their Custom Table Wizard tool and conducting a query on military and veteran organizations (Code W30).

<sup>5</sup>Post-9/11 veterans are faring better in the labor market than the general public, although younger cohorts (ages 18-24) are particularly vulnerable to unemployment compared to their civilian counterparts.

<sup>6</sup>We would like to acknowledge Phil Carter for his helpful input on this recommendation.







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