

# The US Army War College Quarterly: Parameters

---

Volume 38  
Number 4 *Parameters Winter 2008*

Article 8

---

11-1-2008

## Binding the Nation: National Service in America

Carol Armithead Grigsby

Follow this and additional works at: <https://press.armywarcollege.edu/parameters>

---

### Recommended Citation

Carol A. Grigsby, "Binding the Nation: National Service in America," *Parameters* 38, no. 4 (2008), doi:10.55540/0031-1723.2451.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by USAWC Press. It has been accepted for inclusion in The US Army War College Quarterly: Parameters by an authorized editor of USAWC Press.

# Binding the Nation: National Service in America

CAROL ARMISTEAD GRIGSBY

The United States has been at war for more than seven years, and the end to its struggle against religious extremism is nowhere in sight. Thus far the majority of the campaign has been waged by the military. With the prolonged counterinsurgencies in Afghanistan and Iraq has come a growing realization that more alienated youth could appear on the world's battlefields unless the United States begins to win more decisively the war of ideas.

There is broad agreement among scholars and government officials that "soft power," the power to persuade, is essential as the core element of America's response to al Qaeda and other Islamic extremist groups. International opprobrium regarding extraterritorial rendition of terrorist suspects and the treatment of prisoners at Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib has greatly damaged America's reputation, although the recent reorientation in US diplomatic positions and military techniques is beginning to restore that esteem. To offer the world more than the prevailing image of a heavy-handed hegemon, the United States will have to shed the sense of fear that has characterized so much of America's domestic and international rhetoric in the new century. To renew the values that make this nation strong will require a strong sense of American identity, as well as a willingness and readiness to face pressing national challenges. There is little in the recent fabric of American political or cultural life to encourage such a sense of common resolve, but without a competing positive reality to offer the world, countering the lure of extremism's narrative may prove beyond reach.

Americans today share little in the way of a national "story," especially one consisting of shared experiences and struggles. The populace is two generations beyond World War II, the last war that demanded and received the full measure of America's dedication and resolve. Wartime service of any kind has touched relatively few Americans, and other programs of service to the nation have attracted limited participation. In the years following 9/11,

the idea of civilian national service has received renewed consideration on the part of thinkers and politicians. Without strong national leadership on the issue, however, this debate has generated little action. Given the promise the concept of national service holds for strengthening the foundations of America's national identity, the moment is ripe for new voices to emerge on its behalf. This article argues that civilian national service can contribute to the nation by forging a new sense of national community, rebuilding the connection between the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, and restoring sound civil-military relationships. In many ways, the groundwork has already been laid, but the existing spark of an idea needs to be fanned into reality.

## *Challenges*

### *Protracted International Struggle*

With hindsight, Americans will understand the struggle in which the United States is currently engaged far better than is now possible. Terminology such as “the Global War on Terrorism” probably will not sufficiently define the conflict in the end, given that term’s unsatisfying focus on a tactic of warfare and the diffuse nature of the adversary it implies. Whatever the descriptor, it is a generational struggle that has high stakes for the future of the United States and the world. With the results obtained to date after seven years of conflict, it is now clear that a purely military solution is inadequate. The depths of anger and alienation that are the wellspring of insurgent recruitment cannot be completely eradicated by means of bombs and bullets.

Getting at the roots of an insurgency has, throughout history, involved the application of a combination of “hard” and “soft” power. This formula has never been more true than at the present, when terrorism’s proponents are able to draw from a seemingly worldwide supply of disaffected peoples. Al Qaeda’s utopian objective of a restored caliphate, however bizarre to western sensibilities, offers an allure to individuals whose current life circumstance affords few prospects and little hope. The United States, as one of the world’s major powers, will continue to provide a target for international grievances, particularly if the face

---

Carol Armistead Grigsby is a 2008 graduate of the National War College. She has held positions in the State Department, US Agency for International Development, and US Senate.

---

America turns to the world is perceived as unsympathetic. Before America as a nation can project a more positive image abroad, however, we need to reinstitute and revitalize those values that made the nation great.

Although the Cold War created a subtext of fear, punctuated by outbreaks of actual conflict, the American postwar experience, from the 1950s onward, was primarily a story of growing prosperity and comfort. With the end of the Cold War, it seemed the future could be fully dedicated to growing the economy, unhindered by national security constraints; it now is clear that this optimism was premature. While American individualism and the prosperity it brought may have provided an adequate response to the ideological challenge of communism, the present situation calls for a much broader sense of community. Even if the United States is not at risk of widespread homegrown terrorism, it is by no means immune. Criticism leveled by America's fiercest enemies and also by some of its allies provides an opportunity to examine the causes of such alienation in light of the values and principles on which the United States was founded. Vigorously waving the flag and vowing undying support for Americans in uniform while civilians enjoy all the opportunities associated with a peacetime environment is hardly a foundation for citizenship in the twenty-first century. The time has come for a fundamental examination of our value systems and what Americans are willing to do to safeguard these core principles as we enter the third century of nationhood.

### *Lack of National Comity*

Just prior to the events of 9/11, Robert Putnam penned a book that bemoaned the lack of social cohesion in American life.<sup>1</sup> The sacrifices made and response shown by emergency personnel during that tragedy, and the surge in patriotism that followed, produced an increase in Americans' appreciation of government and a renewed interest in service to country and community. This enhanced interest, however, did not produce a significant increase in the actual rate of participation in terms of volunteering or other support activities.<sup>2</sup> Rather than coming together, in fact, Americans in many ways grew further apart. In the recent debate related to illegal immigration, nativist sentiment has dominated the argument. Such a response may itself be an overreaction to the seemingly benign trend of "multiculturalism," with its focus on specific groups rather than individuals. A large influx of populations with a strong attachment to

retaining their language and culture may be generating a shift to an officially bilingual society—whereas previously in the United States a common language has been second only to the flag in symbolic national value.

The fracturing of American society has also manifested itself on the political front. Partisanship has brought national governance to a near-standstill, in spite of the bloodiest attack ever on the continental United States and a sustained two-front war. Such circumstances, that in the past often served to unite the nation, have become in and of themselves the source of even more profound division.<sup>3</sup> The election of Barack Obama as President may signal a change, though this result is far from certain. The nation's slide toward ever-increasing income inequality in recent decades has also created very different realities for Americans depending on their place on the economic spectrum, a situation exacerbated by the latest financial crisis. As a result, the United States is in the precarious position of not really knowing its collective soul, at a time when it is critically important to proudly project the values that made the nation great and its people one.

### *Military and Civilian Worlds*

Whether they supported the government's decision to go to war in Iraq or not, Americans have been consistent in their support for the military.<sup>4</sup> They have apparently learned the lessons of Vietnam in this regard. There may, in fact, be a measure of guilt at work, because civilians are well aware that the normalcy of their lives is in stark contrast to the vicissitudes of military life and in significant measure a result of the military's efforts on their behalf. Civilians who have not chosen the military as a profession experience neither the disruption nor the danger of military life. They do, for the most part, appreciate the fact that their lives have been able to continue without interference while the military has done the difficult tasks. In one sense, this is not surprising. Military life, inhabiting the world of controlled, circumscribed violence as it does, is fundamentally at odds with the civilian way of life.<sup>5</sup>

Since Napoleon's *levee en masse*, the expectation has existed that when a nation mobilizes for war, the people mobilize as well. It is true, however, that at this time, the strains a two-front war is placing on the military are familiar to many Americans. Longer unit deployments, reduced "dwell time" at home stations, utilization of the National Guard and reserves as a committed operational force, and enhanced incentives to encourage reenlistments—all are signs of a military stretched beyond capacity.

Nevertheless, there is little enthusiasm for reinstating a draft to serve the country's needs as had been the normal policy in wartime prior to 1973. The military leadership, on the contrary, is firmly convinced that the technical requirements of modern warfare do not lend themselves to the induction of unskilled, unwilling draftees. The need for well-motivated and technically qualified forces demonstrates the rationale for the all-volunteer force; the idea of populating the military with newly drafted, sullen young soldiers conjures up recollections of everything that went wrong in the jungles of Vietnam.<sup>6</sup>

The United States has for 35 years deployed and shown commitment to an all-volunteer force. The American military is a professional, skilled organization, whose cohesion has been enhanced by the increased "jointness" demanded by modern combat. These reforms are all beneficial in terms of the capabilities the United States is able to bring to the combat environment. Their side effect, however, has been a growing inability on the part of the military and its civilian supporters to understand each other's world. From the military side, the lack of understanding can sometimes be expressed as contempt for the "soft life" of the average American. At the same time, America's civilian population, however supportive of the military it claims to be, is estranged from the values and realities of the uniformed services. The military increasingly inhabits an insulated professional bubble, only touching a limited proportion of the civilian sector, primarily by way of family connections.

Boston University's Andrew Bacevich considers this disconnect a dangerous trend and argues that the American military is "akin to the French Foreign Legion . . . highly trained, handsomely paid professionals who . . . will go anywhere without question to do the bidding of the commander-in-chief." He continues: "A people placing responsibility for national defense in the hands of 'a special class' render themselves 'unfit for liberty,'" quoting General John McAuley Palmer writing between the two World Wars.<sup>7</sup> The extreme example of such professionalization is the much-publicized privatization of certain military jobs, with the potential for the kind of operational and legal questions raised by the shooting of Iraqi citizens by Blackwater Worldwide employees in the fall of 2007.

### ***Military Draft and National Service***

Doubts related to the health of a republic that relies on a professional military are not new.<sup>8</sup> The concept of the citizen soldier, who enjoys the rights of citizenship and yet shoulders its important military responsibilities, is as old

as the United States; so is the tension between that ideal and the compelling need for a professional force.<sup>9</sup> Colonial militias, requiring the service of every able-bodied (nonslave) man, were a feature of life in early America. With the Revolutionary War came the first recognition that a small professional force was required to fight the British army, but the militia remained the backbone of the American military through the War of 1812 and the Mexican War. During the Civil War the Union government placed specific requirements on the states to provide soldiers for the federal army, but individuals were permitted to buy their way out of such service or find a replacement.

In the period immediately prior to World War I, the idea of national service was first introduced into the public debate. Its origins are traditionally attributed to an essay by the educator-philosopher William James, in which he argued that the best qualities of military life can be harnessed in support of “an army against nature.”<sup>10</sup> Coming as it did on the eve of World War I, James’s underlying pacifist sentiment did not gain much support. It did, however, find limited acceptance when it merged with a separate trend of military-style education for privileged youth that ran for two years prior to the US entry into World War I. During that brief period, 20,000 young men participated in summer training camps in Plattsburg, New York, and elsewhere throughout the nation. Simultaneously the state-based National Guard system was introduced, later assuming its dual state-federal status with the National Defense Act of 1916 that also established the Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC).<sup>11</sup> Accompanying America’s entry into actual combat was the Selective Service Act of 1917, under which 24 million men registered for the draft and 2.8 million of those served in the military.<sup>12</sup>

The draft lapsed following World War I, but the Plattsburg movement had made an impression on Franklin Roosevelt, then Assistant Secretary of the Navy.<sup>13</sup> With the onset of the Great Depression, President Roosevelt took up the idea from a different vantage point—putting unemployed youth to work—and created the Civilian Conservation Corps and the related but separate National Youth Administration. This limited experiment with national service created a positive legacy in the public mind, though the President’s plan was seen as a highly productive make-work program rather than a template for a broader national program. President Roosevelt’s objectives were different, however. He would spend much of the World War II years unsuccessfully trying to establish a national-service component as part of the military draft.<sup>14</sup>

On the eve of World War II the military draft was reinstated and would essentially continue until President Richard Nixon declared an end

to conscription in 1973. During the peacetime interregnum between the Korean and Vietnam wars, the Peace Corps was launched with great fanfare in 1961, thereby capturing the imagination of a nation whose foreign policy was driven by idealism on the one hand and the Cold War on the other. President Lyndon Johnson, as part of his War on Poverty, created VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) as the Peace Corps' domestic counterpart. Both programs have survived to the current day. The war in Vietnam altered societal acceptance of the military draft, however, rending the nation over the legitimacy of that war and the use of deferrals to avoid service. While Selective Service registration remains in force for young men 18 or older, it has amounted to little more than an administrative formality.

The 1990s brought a new interest in volunteer service. President George H. W. Bush highlighted volunteerism and signed the National Service Act of 1990 authorizing his Points of Light Foundation and establishing the Commission on National and Community Service. His successor, President Bill Clinton, brought the concept of national service back into political prominence.<sup>15</sup> The Democratic National Committee championed the idea of national service based on intellectual underpinnings laid by the Progressive Policy Institute, and the program became one of the major priorities of the early Clinton presidency. Making national service a reality was no easy matter, though, and the Americorps that emerged in 1993 was far less substantial than the Administration intended, initially consisting of only 20,000 participants. That it emerged at all was a minor miracle, as the entire concept had become highly partisan. Americorps funding then became a political football in the 1995 budget standoff between the Democratic White House and the Republican-controlled Congress.

Fortunately, however, in that same year former Michigan Governor George Romney launched the idea of a summit sponsored by the Corporation for National and Community Service and the Points of Light Foundation to rally support for the idea of "a large-scale domestic Peace Corps." The resulting 1997 summit was chaired by General Colin Powell, who helped rekindle Republican enthusiasm.<sup>16</sup> A significant convert was 2008 presidential nominee John McCain, who had previously been concerned that Americorps would adversely affect other volunteer efforts.<sup>17</sup> In 2001, President George W. Bush, who had been a supporter of Americorps as Governor of Texas, named a strong chief executive officer to the Corporation for National and Community Service, thereby indicating his willingness to support the concept of national service.<sup>18</sup>



The 9/11 attacks generally renewed scholarship and activism in favor of civic involvement, and national service in particular. This resurgence took its most concrete form in the introduction in 2002 of the bipartisan “Call to Service Act” by Senator McCain and Senator Evan Bayh, proposing a fivefold increase in the size of Americorps from its level of 50,000 participants to 250,000 members. Senators McCain and Bayh also proposed that military recruits be permitted to serve shorter enlistments in exchange for completing their service through the Americorps.<sup>33</sup> Although a large expansion of Americorps never emerged, President Bush did sign the “National Call to Service” initiative in 2003, allowing military members to offset part of their military obligation by working in Americorps. As of 2006 more than 4,000 military members had taken advantage of this opportunity.<sup>20</sup> Mirroring Senator McCain’s previous initiative, Barack Obama made “a new call to service” one of the hallmarks of his presidential campaign, encouraging voluntary national service in an expanded Peace Corps and Americorps.<sup>21</sup>

### *What National Service Can Do for America*

It is increasingly evident that the military is not well-suited to address the full spectrum of tasks required by the struggle against extremism.<sup>22</sup> Still, the threats America now faces, which are longer-term and more diffuse than the challenges posed by militaristic nations with territorial designs, carry the risk of catching the United States unawares. Similar to the Cold War, this conflict is likely to be an ongoing struggle stretching for decades, requiring the exercise of military and diplomatic power and a renewed mustering of America’s fundamental strength as a nation. The Cold War began after a World War that had created a profound sense of community and common purpose among the American people. The potentially lengthy struggle that currently lies ahead, in contrast, has been preceded by a lengthy period during which Americans have been able to pursue their individual dreams and aspirations with little thought for the greater good. Even the memory of 9/11 is beginning to fade from the national consciousness.

This moment in history affords an opportunity to recapture the essence of what it means to be American and to ensure that future generations will have a solid understanding of the challenges they will face. In this context, a renewed bipartisan push toward universal national service is appropriate and perhaps essential. Such a program has potential to forge a new sense of

national community, rebuild the connection between the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, and reestablish a sound civil-military relationship.

- Bring together young people from different walks of life to forge a renewed sense of American identity and comity.

Veterans of any war share a common experience, the intensity of which creates strong and enduring relationships. The limited wars fought by the United States following World War II, however, have not produced enough veterans to have an appreciable impact on the common American experience. The ties that bound those who returned home after World War II are legendary. In that war, 70 percent of American men aged 18 to 35 served in the military.<sup>23</sup> That common experience forged lifetime relationships among WWII veterans, and—affecting as it did such a large proportion of American society—wove a common fabric of understanding and camaraderie for an entire generation. No other conflict, large or small, has come close since then. The current proportion of veterans in the US population is less than 10 percent, and those veterans are derived from several midsize conflicts (Korea, Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan) as well as a number of smaller conflicts and emergencies (Grenada, Somalia, and Panama, among others) spanning several generations.<sup>24</sup>

In addition to the military, other life experiences have offered their “veterans” a similar sense of lifetime membership. During almost 50 years of existence, the Peace Corps has developed an important role in US outreach to nations. The Corps has also produced a small but dedicated band of Americans who share an interest in international issues and a common recollection of “the toughest job you’ll ever love.”<sup>25</sup> This service has transcended the diverse backgrounds of individual participants and built lasting relationships. Despite that degree of commonality, former Peace Corps volunteers represent an increasingly small portion of American society. Other agencies, most notably VISTA and, more recently, Americorps (which now subsumes VISTA and other federal volunteer programs), have created new avenues for domestic service. As of the end of 2008, however, Americorps and the Peace Corps have enrolled less than 750,000 participants.<sup>26</sup>

These individual programs do show signs of creating loyalty and uniting Americans from different backgrounds.<sup>27</sup> They simply do not reach a large enough segment of American society to form a common experience capable of bringing together a large

proportion of the citizenry. Thus they are unable to create the same sense of belonging that the World War II generation enjoyed.

- Apply the energy and talent of youth to our national priorities, rebuilding the connection between the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.

Most Americans would agree on a short list of national priorities which require urgent attention and might benefit from the ideas and enthusiasm of America's young people. On that list would most likely be such items as elder care, environmental remediation, assistance to underprivileged children, reducing urban poverty and homelessness, disaster preparedness, and basic infrastructure maintenance. These are the types of objectives already being addressed by Americorps, which is divided into three components to address these issues: the National Civilian Community Corps, having relatively few uniformed members,<sup>28</sup> works on service projects as part of teams based at five campuses around the nation; VISTA volunteers work in impoverished areas; and Americorps State and National provides grants and volunteers to nonprofit organizations.<sup>29</sup> A great deal of discussion has been devoted to the specific tasks that might be performed within a national-service program. Unfortunately, a public dialogue regarding national priorities that might support such efforts and be key to developing popular support for the concept is still missing. What is crucial is to reconnect the concepts of rights and responsibilities, and the proper role of government, in the public's mind. As residents of a nation enjoying relative prosperity and privilege, Americans pay little attention to the system of governance that makes their life possible. A 1986 Ford Foundation study observed, "Military veterans, Peace Corps alumni and, ironically, immigrants are now virtually the only Americans who experience a sense of citizenship earned rather than simply received."<sup>30</sup> This condition remains true today. For all young Americans to experience a brief period during which they are required to perform tasks of value to the nation would go a long way in acquainting future generations with the obligations of citizenship.

As with Americorps, national service needs to be structured in such a manner as to encourage a lifelong spirit of volunteerism.<sup>31</sup> Ideally, it would inculcate the values of civilian service in much the same way that requirements for community service are an integral part of high school graduation in many parts of America. While instilling such values,

national service should not be a simple matter of unleashing millions of untrained volunteers. When well-motivated, trained, and coordinated, volunteers are capable of accomplishing a great deal for our nation. Often, however, efforts are not well-coordinated; this fact, when combined with the involvement of an ever-changing array of participants, can result in a great deal of wasted resources and effort. A national service program needs clear standards and structure to ensure that the type of missions being undertaken efficiently and effectively address the nation's critical needs.

- Create a ready pool of citizens who, if already involved in national service, may be willing to pursue a military option.

The involvement of America's youth in national service might help bridge the gap between the society at large and its military. This relationship may be manifested in terms of an improved understanding of those serving in the military—who, like the national service participants, are recognized as fulfilling their responsibilities as citizens—a feeling that could engender a greater willingness to volunteer for military service. In the United States military service has been considered the standard for national service, with nonmilitary alternatives only being offered to conscientious objectors. In other nations with a requirement for national service, military service has also been the standard, and domestic service a secondary option.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, it is hard to declare with any certainty that the prospect of civilian service would entice individuals to volunteer for military service, but this could be the case for two likely reasons.

First, the mutual experience of national service would in itself afford young people a greater understanding of the discipline, purpose, and loyalty that military service entails. The Vietnam-era distinctions between the “flower power” of Peace Corps volunteers and macho grunts is already less acute than it was at the end of the conflict, and this lack of hostility between the military and society at large has leveled, to some degree, the playing field in terms of societal attitudes. The fact that today's young people did not live through the divisive Vietnam era should be helpful in this regard.

Second, a young person who knows that he or she has to serve in some type of national service role for a specified period may be more prone to opt instead for service in the military. The proffered alternatives would then not be between total freedom of choice and joining the military, but rather between required civil service and the military option.

The Congress could further strengthen incentives for military service by enhancing educational benefits under the GI bill. Even if only effective at the margins, more young men and women would likely enlist, thereby helping address recruiting challenges. The existence of a civilian national service program could actually alleviate pressure for reinstating the draft.

### *The Way Forward*

The America of today remains enamored of the “pursuit of happiness” embodied in the Declaration of Independence, and anything that suggests an abridgement of that right is unlikely to be met with widespread enthusiasm. One should remember, however, that the current belief in individual freedom that has come to epitomize the American way of life is a relatively new phenomenon. If one positive element can come out of the horrors associated with 9/11, it would be the reminder that the United States was founded on a set of values that Americans ignore at their peril.

The opportunity for all men and women between the ages of 18 and 24 to dedicate a year and a half to national service could have a transformative impact on the fabric of the nation. It could change the way individuals view their responsibilities as citizens, create stronger ties across divisions of class and culture, and instill a deeper understanding of the sacrifices required in the defense of the nation. Leadership is crucial, however, to build acceptance of national service as a “rite of passage” for young adults.<sup>33</sup> At this writing, anxiety regarding the economy and job preservation has already engendered plans for a stimulus package with features modeled on several of the Depression-era national service programs. To be successful, though, any new initiative in this arena needs to address several issues.

The place to begin is by highlighting public awareness of successful programs already under way, while engaging in a dialogue to identify the critical national priorities that should be the focus of these programs in the future. The presumption should not be an attempt to reinvent the wheel, but rather to build on established programs and relationships. Americorps could easily be expanded from its current level of 75,000 volunteers per year.<sup>34</sup> Its three programs also provide different experiences from which to choose; a large portion of these are already being managed by state service commissions. The Peace Corps, currently consisting of less than 8,000 volunteers as compared to more than 15,000 at its height, also has ample room for growth.<sup>35</sup> The key to success will be in keeping the programs simple,

focused on the recruitment and development of youth, and establishing a foundation on existing programs with records of success. A national service program should not become a clearinghouse for every volunteer effort, but rather a well-focused initiative with clearly articulated and achievable goals.

A program of national service will need to be phased in over time. This stipulation is necessary, first, because instituting a program designed to reach all Americans in the 18 to 24 age group would be fiscally impossible at this time. The per-person cost of Americorps' programs has been estimated at \$16,000.<sup>36</sup> By that measure, the total cost of enrolling the 25 million Americans in the targeted age group would be unfeasible given the current realities of the national budget.<sup>37</sup> Second, a phasing-in process would help stimulate support for the concept. Many Americans might perceive universal national service as a reintroduction of a military draft. It would take considerable reassurance, and years of gradual growth, for American society to see a distinction. The inclusion of the Peace Corps within the program might help in this regard, since the Corps has a distinctly civilian aura. Paradoxically, as the program of national service gains strength, it may overcome some of the reservations to military service, as previously outlined.

Greater creativity of effort needs to go into determining how to fund the program. The well-intentioned and sound arguments for universal national service may all be undercut if the wealthy simply opt out of the program. Were that to occur, national service would rapidly devolve into a make-work program for the less advantaged, subject to many of the same criticisms that were leveled at the draft. At the same time, a universal program of national service risks becoming another unsustainable entitlement program unless creative approaches can be established to finance it. One way to avoid another massive bureaucracy is to build on the model of state administration already used under the Americorps State program. Going further, any financial analysis would need to quantify the costs to American society if we fail to address the national priorities enumerated earlier. A program of national service should also entail the establishment of a public-private partnership designed to defray many of the costs, as well as a concerted effort on the part of government to partner with colleges and universities in an effort to link service with educational requirements. Bringing various unions into the discussions would also be necessary, due primarily to concerns related to displacement of low-wage jobs that undermined earlier initiatives.<sup>38</sup> Viable financing solutions require time to mature, another reason for a more gradual approach.

To be certain, courageous leadership is required at every level of government if we are to build the required support for any concept related to national service. American society needs to be inspired in an attempt to think and look beyond personal comforts in an effort to understand the existential challenge the nation faces. This challenge is existential, not because extremist groups threaten the United States with annihilation, but because the struggle America has been losing, even prior to 9/11, is a war of ideas rather than weapons. Any hint of imperial swagger only serves to demonstrate that the United States has lost its soul. We can do better, enabling our nation to reconnect with the core values and beliefs that made it great. Americans enjoy immense freedom, a freedom for which everyone, not just the few, should be willing to sacrifice. It is time to rediscover that patriotism means more than waving the flag or wearing a lapel pin.

Although the effort will take time to provide dividends, a program of universal national service, implemented over time, can assist the nation in regaining its sense of collective national purpose. Even in its infancy, the idealism of the effort will begin to reestablish America as a beacon of collective freedom for the world to admire and respect. Many Americans espoused the view during the recent presidential campaign that the nation should come together and set aside its differences. Because the concept of national service has strong conceptual proponents in both major political parties, it should be possible to overcome partisanship and make significant progress in this arena. Both President Obama and his campaign rival Senator McCain expressed support for national service, demonstrating that the issue truly transcends partisanship. This proclaimed unity is a start and demonstrates it is within our power to rekindle the true spirit of America and chart a course toward a stronger future.

#### NOTES

1. Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000).

2. Robert D. Putnam, "Bowling Together," in E. J. Dionne, Jr., Kayla Meltzer Drogosz, and Robert E. Litan, eds., *United We Serve: National Service and the Future of Citizenship* (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2003), 13-19.

3. The notable exception is the Vietnam War.

4. The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, *Trends in Political Values and Core Attitudes: 1987-2007* (Washington: The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 2007), <http://people-press.org/reports/pdf/312.pdf>, 23-34.

5. Not all, or even most, civilian populations are spared in wartime, and with the upsurge in insurgencies and terrorism the habitual distinctions between civilian and fighter in wartime are increasingly blurred.

6. The statement of General Peter Pace, then-Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, to troops at Camp Lemonier, Djibouti, in 2007 is typical of the prevailing view in the military leadership. See Jim Garamone,

“Pace Applauds All-Volunteer Force,” *American Forces Press Service*, 14 August 2007, <http://www.defenselink.mil/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=47048>.

7. Andrew J. Bacevich, *The New American Militarism: How Americans Are Seduced by War* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2005), 218.

8. This section owes a debt to Charles C. Moskos, *A Call to Civic Service: National Service for Country and Community* (New York: The Free Press, 1988), 14-61, for its excellent history of military conscription and nonmilitary national service; and to E. J. Dionne, Jr., and Kayla Meltzer Drogosz, “United We Serve? The Promise of National Service,” in Dionne, Drogosz, and Litan, 1-10, and Harris Wofford, “The Politics of Service,” in Dionne, Drogosz, and Litan, 45-51.

9. Moskos, 14ff.

10. William James, *The Moral Equivalent of War* (New York: American Association for International Conciliation, 1910).

11. ROTC ranks grew during the 1920s and 1930s but went from being mandatory for male students at land-grant universities to being a voluntary program. (Moskos, 22.)

12. *Ibid.*, 21.

13. *Ibid.*, 20.

14. John Greenya, “Should Community Service Be Required?” *The CQ Researcher*, 30 June 2006, 11.

15. Wofford, 48.

16. *Ibid.*, 49-50.

17. John McCain, “Patriotism Means Reaching Beyond Our Self-Interest,” in Dionne, Drogosz, and Litan, 63.

18. Wofford, 50.

19. McCain, 66.

20. Greenya, 16.

21. Barack Obama, “A Call to Serve” (Mount Vernon, Iowa: 5 December 2007).

22. Thomas Barnett lays out the case for this perspective in “The Pentagon’s New Map for War and Peace” (Monterey, Calif.: TED Conference, 26 February 2005), <http://www.ted.com/index.php/talks/view/id/33>. Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates took it up as well in his “Landon Lecture.” (Manhattan: Kansas State Univ., 26 November 2007.)

23. Moskos, 23. Dr. Irving Smith of the US Military Academy places the figure at more than half of those eligible for military service and approximately one-third of the total population. (Irving Smith, e-mail to the author and others, 18 December 2008.)

24. According to the US Department of Veterans Affairs, veterans now number 23,532,000. (Department of Veterans Affairs, “VA Benefits and Health Care Utilization,” 24 January 2008.)

25. Popular Peace Corps recruiting motto.

26. According to <http://www.americorps.gov> and <http://www.peacecorps.gov>, as of 20 December 2008 there have been 540,000 Americorps participants and 195,000 Peace Corps volunteers.

27. One former Americorps volunteer told the author, “There’s no doubt that Americorps members become more involved and concerned citizens and do definitely share a pride in their service and an esprit de corps with other members.” (Eric Himelfarb, e-mail to author, 28 February 2008.)

28. All Americorps participants receive education stipends and, in some cases, such as the National Civilian Community Corps, housing.

29. Greenya, 2.

30. Richard Danzig and Peter Szanton, *National Service: What Would It Mean?* (New York: Ford Foundation, 1986), 277. Cited in Greenya, 13.

31. McCain, 63-64.

32. Greenya, 13.

33. Credited to Will Marshall of the Progressive Policy Institute in Richard Just, “Suddenly Serviceable: Is This the Moment for National Service?” *The American Prospect*, January 2002, 2.

34. <http://www.americorps.gov>.

35. Greenya, 11-12, and <http://www.peacecorps.gov>.

36. Greenya, 7.

37. US Census Bureau, “Voting and Registration in the Election of November 2004,” March 2006, <http://www.census.gov/prod/2006pubs/p20-556.pdf>.

38. Greenya, 11, with regard to Roosevelt’s efforts.