

What's in a Name? Defining and Caring for "Veterans" : The United Kingdom in International Perspective

Christopher Dandeker, Simon Wessely, Amy Iversen and John Ross

Armed Forces & Society 2006 32: 161

DOI: 10.1177/0095327X05279177

The online version of this article can be found at:

<http://afs.sagepub.com/content/32/2/161>

Published by:



<http://www.sagepublications.com>

On behalf of:

[Inter-University Seminar on Armed Forces and Society](#)

Additional services and information for *Armed Forces & Society* can be found at:

Email Alerts: <http://afs.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

Subscriptions: <http://afs.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

Reprints: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

Permissions: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav>

Citations: <http://afs.sagepub.com/content/32/2/161.refs.html>

What's in a Name? Defining and Caring for "Veterans"

The United Kingdom in International Perspective

Christopher Dandeker
Simon Wessely
Amy Iversen
John Ross
King's College London

An important feature of civil-military relations is the way in which states recognize the sacrifices that the men and women of the armed forces give to their country and provide care and support for them and their families once they leave the military as veterans. Yet states differ not only in the levels and kinds of support provided for ex-service personnel but also in their very definition of what a veteran is. This article examines the case of the United Kingdom from an international perspective. It explains how and why the United Kingdom has developed a particular—and inclusive—definition of *veteran* and, in conjunction with veterans interest groups, a strategy for allocating scarce resources to this group. The article analyzes attempts to mitigate the effects of social exclusion suffered by some subgroups within the veteran population, although the great majority does well at least in terms of short-term employment prospects. It concludes with an analysis of the dilemmas that are likely to confront those responsible for developing policy on veterans issues in the future, especially where to target scarce resources in such an inclusively defined group of the population.

Keywords: *veterans; social exclusion; UK military; personnel policy; ex-service personnel*

Introduction: Veterans and Civil-Military Relations

As events in Iraq since 2003 remind us, a significant feature of civil-military relations is the way in which states recognize the sacrifices that the men and women of the armed forces have given to their country—whether or not on active service—and provide care and support for them and their families. The special contributions of service

personnel reflect their unique “contract of unlimited liability” with the state: the obligation that in the course of exercising lethal force against opposing forces, they have to risk—even to lay down—their lives and require that their subordinates do the same.¹

When considering what and how different states provide for their veterans, together with the ways in which the veterans themselves and wider society perceive the appropriateness and legitimacy of government actions, a fundamental, underlying question is, what is a “veteran”? The importance of this question is illustrated by the fact that the apparently simple issue of how many veterans there are—let alone establishing their needs and how they might be met—depends on what definition is being used. Furthermore, definitions of *veteran* not only shape the scale of what is considered to be the veteran population but also underpin the sociolegal framework within which their needs, rights, and concerns evolve and are dealt with. As governments and wider publics define *veteran* in different ways, their definitions provide the context within which they develop strategies for responding to the needs of veterans. In doing so, governments are made aware that however veterans are defined, their experiences and needs depend on which country they live in, as well as their age, gender, marital status, and ethnicity; the armed force in which they served; the circumstances in which they were discharged; and a number of other social aspects of their postmilitary lives, such as unemployment, housing, and physical and mental health.²

This article focuses on the case of UK veterans from an international perspective. It analyzes the similarities and differences among various national definitions of *veteran* and explains why the UK government has adopted its current version. The article then shows how this definition, in recent years, has influenced how government has interacted with veterans interest groups to develop a strategy for allocating scarce resources to the veteran population. This strategy has had to address a range of questions, such as how to limit the social exclusion experienced by some veterans, defined not only in terms of position in the labor market but also by wider social participation, including being valued and remembered by civilian society. Finally, the article considers some of the policy dilemmas that are associated with the UK strategy for veterans and why these are likely to remain significant features of this area of public policy in the future.

What Is a Veteran? Choosing Inclusive or Exclusive Definitions

Definitions of *veteran* vary depending on whether the user is a government agency, engaged in determining who does and does not qualify for receipt of support and services due to their military standing, or wider publics who may have different views on what ex-service members need to have accomplished to be considered as deserving of veteran status. In either case, an important consideration is the extent to which these definitions are more or less restrictive in terms of criteria such as the nature, location, and duration of military service. A range of ideal typical possibilities is presented in Table 1, in descending order of inclusiveness. The most inclusive is based on receiving a day’s military pay (whether or not one has met the training requirements or served on

Table 1
What Is a Veteran?

Definition	Advantages	Disadvantages
1. All personnel who have served more than one day (and their dependents)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarity • Appeals to recruits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At odds with service • Public opinion • Cost
2. All personnel who have completed basic training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less inclusive • Fairer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As above
3. All personnel who have completed one term of engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Closest match to public/charities opinion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excludes the most vulnerable
4. All personnel who have served in an active deployment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pleases the public • Perceived to be a clear role of the Ministry of Defence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficult to define active deployment

Table 2
Veterans in International Perspective

Country	Population	Veterans	Veterans per Million
Australia	19.8 mil	521,700	26,348
Canada	31.49 mil	209,000	6,637
United States	252 mil	26,549,704	90,923
United Kingdom	59.2 mil	13,000,000	219,594

a deployment or seen action), and the most exclusive requires personnel to have undertaken some kind of active service. Depending on the definition employed, states will generate different numbers of veterans as well as policies designed to address their concerns. Some key contrasts are displayed in Table 2.³

In the following section, the reasons that the United Kingdom and a range of other countries have come to define veterans in different ways are explored before turning, in the following section, to a discussion of how the UK government's strategy for veterans has sought to draw on the benefits of the choice it has taken without incurring the disadvantages.

Why do countries opt for different definitions? Much of the answer to this question depends on the historical context. Wyatt has suggested that to understand how governments and societies define and respond to the needs of veterans, the history of warfare in each country needs to be considered, including the ways in which civilian populations were involved. For example, in the case of the United Kingdom, he argues that because of the total mobilization of the population for war between 1939 and 1945 and the consequent sharing of suffering and loss by both civilians and the military, the concept of veteran with—to British eyes—its implied meaning of exclusivity has not sat well with public perceptions and attitudes.⁴

By contrast, the United States, and some Commonwealth countries such as Australia, “did not wage war at home nor were their civilian populations involved to the same extent as the UK or suffered similar hardships.” These countries did, however, “send large numbers of military personnel abroad in both the World Wars and in other theatres of war such as Vietnam.” Since then, they have invested significantly in the task of remembering and valuing the military contributions of their service personnel as indications of the special status of veterans; this investment is reflected in the ways in which they organize remembrance services, rituals, and other activities.⁵

A further consideration is the way in which national patterns of civil-military relations refract the historical experience of war. In the case of Australia, for example, the losses experienced during the First World War were, in some respects, a conscious decision to “blood” the nation in war: its military casualties were losses endured by a new citizen state, in which civilians, although relatively safe at home, nonetheless felt a conscious involvement in and appreciation of the losses experienced by their personnel abroad.⁶

Force structure is another important dimension of civil-military relations and interacts with national history. In Sweden, for example, perceptions of who is a veteran are influenced by the system of conscription and the protection of Swedish sovereignty and neutrality from external threat, especially from the Soviet Union. Although military service is much less universal than it was due to force restructuring and downsizing since the end of the cold war, society still attaches significant status to those who have served (honorably); this is reflected in the favorable attitudes of employers to those who have completed their service satisfactorily. Today, due to the status of military service, the defense forces can be quite selective in recruiting the reduced numbers of personnel needed for their downsized military. Indeed, in Sweden, this has led to some complaints from those who have not been selected to serve, because they have been denied the employment benefits likely to arise from a successful period of service. This attitude contrasts with the experience of other countries such as France, which, especially during the last decade of its conscription system, experienced complaints from the minority of the cohort who were asked to serve as some felt they were forgoing the advantages of accumulating social capital by remaining in civilian higher education. However, in Sweden, the special status of veterans may well go into decline in the future because of the dwindling numbers of the population being involved in—and having knowledge of—the defense forces.⁷

In contrast to the above cases, successive British governments have tended to forget and neglect their ex-service personnel once they have left the armed forces. This culture of neglect is connected with Britain’s long history of possessing a professional, volunteer military—conscription has been the exception not the norm. Consequently, Britain developed a tradition of civil-military relations well before the development of the modern citizenship state. A central feature of this tradition has been the paradoxical relationship between the armed forces, the state, and civilian society. Government was able to develop systems of military manpower long before service members were in any position to enforce robust citizenship rights.⁸ Meanwhile, both government and much of the wider public could maintain feelings of pride in their armed forces, which

could, quite easily, sit alongside perceptions of the military's being on the margins of society; indeed, this was reinforced by its being deployed overseas on imperial duties. Proud of their armed forces, they could nonetheless adopt the view that looking after ex-service personnel was someone else's responsibility. For many soldiers through the ages, their experience on departing the armed forces has been to hear the words "good bye and good luck!" This is not to deny countertrends. As Stanhope remarked a quarter of a century ago,

Britain's record for caring for ex-servicemen has not always been distinguished. There are those who would argue that [in 1979] it still falls short of the ideal. *But it is better than it was*, and the man who is really down on his luck should be able to find help somewhere.⁹

A key feature of this less-than-ideal record is that the central organs of the British state have not played a key role in providing assistance to ex-service personnel. Instead, this has flowed from a patchwork of regimental and corps associations from the early nineteenth century, followed by civilian charities, and only later still by the post-Second World War welfare state, which made services available to all citizens—both military and civilian.¹⁰

In providing support for ex-service personnel, both the government and the wider British public have traditionally been cautious about using the term *veteran*. As Barr has suggested, it is

more used in the USA than in Britain to describe people who have served in the Armed Forces. The USA celebrates 11 November (Armistice Day in Britain and the Commonwealth) as Veterans' Day to honour all men and women who have served in the US Armed Forces, *without implying* that they have seen active service.¹¹

In the United Kingdom, the norm has been to use *ex-service* to describe those who have been employed in the armed forces, with the term *veteran* reserved for those who have served in military operations and, by implication, for those who have been called upon to perform the unique obligations implied by the military contract.¹² This norm has been reflected in contemporary public attitudes as is indicated in a recent survey (see Table 3).

The survey indicates that the majority of the general public considers veterans to be those who have served in the world wars of the twentieth century or, at most, those who have been involved in operational service. By inference, for this sector of public opinion, a *young* veteran today would be regarded as a contradiction in terms.

The United Kingdom has recently formalized its approach to veterans, using the most inclusive of the definitions available: all personnel who have served more than one day (together with their dependants). By this definition, it is estimated that there are approximately 5.5 million ex-service personnel, which together with their 7.5 million dependants forms some 13 million people, or about 20 percent of the UK population.¹³ Currently, the United Kingdom's socially inclusive approach is most similar to the one adopted by New Zealand.¹⁴

Table 3
Who Is a Veteran? UK Public Perceptions

Those in WW1/WW2	57%
All ex-service personnel	37%
Served overseas—Campaigns	29%
Served overseas—Peacekeeping	16%
Antiterrorist operations	10%
Don't know	6%

Source: The data were drawn from an Ipsos Capibus Omnibus survey of 2,013 respondents by the Central Office of Information, "Inserted Questions to Determine Public Perceptions towards Veterans" (December 2002). The Central Office of Information is a UK government executive agency, which provides information and impartial advice to a wide range of public sector clients, including the major government departments such as the Ministry of Defence.

A more restrictive approach, and one that may sit better with the wider British public, would be to confine the term *veteran* to all personnel who have completed basic training and who have, therefore, actually qualified to engage in the military contract rather than just having expressed a desire to do so by applying to and being accepted by the recruitment office.¹⁵ This idea could be restricted further to include only personnel who have completed at least one term of engagement, now four years for a soldier in the British army. In the United States, for example, veterans are defined as personnel who have served for a minimum period of service and have been discharged with at least the status of "honorable" despite the fact that they may not have served on operations. Furthermore, in the United States, the kind of rewards to which veterans may be entitled varies according to the length and nature of military service (which can extend to service in the merchant marine in war).¹⁶

While the UK government's definition of *veteran* is, from the standpoint of the majority of the wider public, counterintuitive, the reverse can be said about the approach adopted by other Commonwealth countries such as Australia and Canada, or by European neighbors such as the Netherlands. For example, in Australia, veterans are defined as personnel who have served in an active deployment overseas—the implication that *veteran* implies a real sacrifice is clear. Meanwhile, the Dutch provide another way of defining veterans, again in terms of operational experience: a veteran is any former member of the military who was engaged in war or who participated in UN or other international peacekeeping operations.¹⁷ Countries select definitions of *veteran* for different reasons, as we shall now see in more detail in the British case.

The UK Government's Selection of an Inclusive Definition of *Veteran*

Why has the UK government adopted the most inclusive definition available in terms of the options outlined earlier in Table 1? The immediate circumstances that led to a change in policy were as follows. First, there was negative, politically charged

press coverage of the condition of ex-service personnel, for example, the high-profile media coverage of the homeless in London, with some reports suggesting that 25 percent or more had once served in the armed forces.¹⁸

Furthermore, such reports were used by the service charities to exert pressure on government to do more for the veterans community, and in this, they were able to draw on the support of powerful patrons, such as the Prince of Wales, whose personal interventions were of critical importance. The service charities such as the Royal British Legion (RBL), Combat Stress, and the Soldiers', Sailors', Airmen and Families Association achieve corporate influence on government, specifically the Veterans Agency of the Ministry of Defence (MoD), through such bodies as the Ex-Services Action Group and the Veterans Forum, chaired by the Minister for Veterans, whose members include not only government departments but also Chairman of Confederation of British Service and Ex-Service Organisations. The forum is now responsible for developing work to support the strategy for veterans, which is discussed later.

Another feature of press coverage was a concern about whether the MoD was doing enough to look after the personnel in its care. There was also debate about military training—whether there were a proper balance between a regime that was tough enough to provide the armed forces with people fit to fight and one that was also in line with broader liberal sensibilities and laws concerning respect for the dignity of the individual.¹⁹ These discussions extended to focus on whether the armed forces were doing enough to protect their personnel from risks encountered at the point of transition to civilian life after service and whether these had to do with acquiring simply jobs or broader life-skills training that would be useful outside the immediate labor-market context. These controversies found their way into the law courts as some ex-service personnel alleged that more could and should have been done for their health and welfare during and after their terms of service.²⁰ Negative publicity of the kind discussed above could, it was feared, deter potential recruits and lead to disaffection among those already serving, not least those about to meet the challenges of returning to civilian life.

A second factor that the UK government had to take into account in selecting a definition of *veteran* was the degree to which any approach it adopted dovetailed with the perceptions and definitions held by the wider public. For example, as we shall see in more detail later, the MoD's preferred approach to caring for veterans was based on the idea of compensating and repairing ex-service personnel only if it could be demonstrated that they had been damaged in service. The aim was to restore them as effective players in society on a "level playing field" with other citizens. In recent debates, some had suggested that this approach should shift to a system that ensured that veterans were given a reward that reflected their unique service to their country. This would afford them not only a symbolic, special status as remembered and valued persons but also a material advantage over other citizens, for example, in terms of access to health and other scarce resources. Indeed, there was one example of just this point in action, at least in principle: receipt of a war pension entitled the holder to "queue jump" in terms of health care. But many health authorities and doctors would not recognize this, which was tantamount to a policy of official neglect.²¹

However, applying this principle of bestowing advantage to reciprocate past sacrifices more systematically would require making the definition of *veteran* less inclusive, as in the Australian approach, for example. This is because of the costs involved: a less inclusive definition would allow the targeting of scarce resources to a smaller population.²² Timing would also be a crucial question—when could such an approach be introduced? One possibility would be to do so when the current 1940s and 1950s generation of veterans has faded away. In any event, would such an approach be supported by the wider public given its own definition of what a bona fide veteran is? There would be grounds for conflict if, for example, veterans interest groups pressed for more scarce resources to be allocated to what they considered to be the “deserving”—those who had served for lengthy periods of service, often having seen active service—while government sought to pursue other goals. One such goal has been concerned with problems of social exclusion in society, of which some veterans comprise one dimension. These veterans tend to be those who have served for very short periods or who have not successfully completed training; research shows that they are the most likely to become socially excluded in terms of indicators such as mental health, homelessness, and unemployment.²³ There could, therefore, be a conflict of priorities: should resources go to the first, deserving group in terms of their contribution to society by distinguished military service or to the “needy” in terms of social exclusion? Indeed, this conflict is the basis of persistent dilemmas in veterans policy that will be discussed later.

The Advantages and Disadvantages of the Inclusive Approach

Having discussed the different ways in which governments and publics can define veteran populations, we now turn to an analysis of the costs and benefits of their choices. Governments and publics select different definitions of *veteran* for a variety of reasons, and we have considered how and why the UK government has reached its own decision on the matter. In doing so, it weighed the potential costs and benefits of its selected course of action, especially as it sought to use the definition as a platform for a strategy to deal with veterans affairs.

Given the historical context discussed earlier, the first—and political—benefit of the inclusive definition was its clarity and simplicity. It is the least controversial definition because it does not exclude anyone or force policy makers to be explicit about their views on why they have decided to target (and thus value) narrowly defined groups of ex-service members in terms of the delivery of scarce resources. Its proponents can argue that it enables the design of flexible packages of benefits for particular subgroups that fall within the broad category of veterans.²⁴ Nevertheless, there is a risk that such a broad definition will stretch resources so thinly that it leads to the de facto neglect of the veterans community as a whole. Yet this approach, based on such an inclusive definition, is understandable given the culture of “good bye and good luck”

and “farewell and neglect” that has been a distinctive feature of British civil-military relations.

A second benefit to be gained from the inclusive definition is that it can be used to underpin attempts to recruit and retain personnel for the armed forces. It is argued that providing improved services to veterans, whatever length of service they complete, will also increase recruitment incentives; at the least, a career in the armed services might be more attractive to those who are uncertain about their commitment of time to a military way of life. In any case, it has been suggested that improved benefits for veterans would be more appealing to today's young people who, compared with earlier generations, are much more consumerist in orientation and expect more services by right than did those who served during the Second World War.²⁵ On the other hand, this approach might be less attractive to those who joined the military out of a sense of vocation—that is, for institutional rather than occupational motives—and who might feel that one has to earn one's benefits rather than be entitled to them. The balance of advantage here would depend on whether one were defending the case that the armed forces needed to ensure that they could attract and recruit not only the enthusiastic, who were already imbued with military values, but also those who were more cautious or even wary about the armed forces. This is a key point for those seeking to recruit as well as retain in the “teeth” arms of the army in particular. The evidence indicates that even in a downsized military, the services can ill afford to rely too heavily on their traditional core areas for their recruits.²⁶

These arguments, which pose the problem of balancing normative equity and business efficiency, have been rehearsed in earlier literature on military policy.²⁷ In addition, they have been echoed in cases other than the United Kingdom's: new all-volunteer forces such as those of the Dutch and the French have stressed that one of the drivers of their own policies on veterans has been a concern to ensure that the climate for recruitment and retention is as favorable as possible.²⁸ Furthermore, such business-rather than equity-based arguments have not been confined to the question of veterans but can be applied to other social groups, such as minority ethnic communities and women.²⁹ However, ensuring a balance between these two quite different logics is fraught with difficulty: veterans and other groups will be wary of being allocated resources less on the grounds of what they deserve in terms of past service and more on the basis of meeting military recruitment targets.

A third advantage of the United Kingdom's inclusive definition is the possibility of making a policy designed for the military population serve broader social objectives. As mentioned earlier, the UK government has perceived an opportunity not only to help vulnerable veterans, especially those facing difficulties, but also to make a contribution to the wider agenda of tackling social exclusion. Helping vulnerable people at the margins of society—civilian or ex-service—fosters both social cohesion and greater participation in the labor market. However, on the available evidence, it is not clear whether those interest groups concerned with tackling broader issues of social exclusion (such as, within government, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister) have played a key role in determining which definition was used, nor was it clear whether

they were in a position to use the definition once it was adopted to influence policy afterward.

The inclusive definition of *veteran*, however, also has disadvantages. First, as we have seen, it is counterintuitive for much of the general public, as well as some military personnel themselves (both serving and ex-). For example, including all family members of service personnel, whatever their length and nature of service, does not appeal to those who regard veterans in a more restricted way. Some of those who hold this view—for example, among some UK service charities, such as RBL—are concerned about ensuring that scarce resources are targeted at those who, by virtue of their operational military service, genuinely deserve compensation.³⁰

A second difficulty is that the inclusive definition risks conveying the impression that benefits for veterans can only, in principle, be at a very basic or minimal level. This is because of the very breadth of the definition, together with the widely acknowledged limits on how much any government can reasonably be expected to spend in this area. One illustration of this point concerns debates in 2001 and 2002 over what might have been the entitlements of those possessing a proposed veterans identity card. If all were to receive the same benefits or entitlements, then these would, perforce, be of a basic standard because of the costs involved. This, in turn, raised the question of whether the costs of such a card would be worth the material benefits distributed to individual cases, unless one could argue that the symbolic benefits in terms of social recognition made the exercise worthwhile overall.³¹

Consequently, one disadvantage of the broad definition is that it leaves its proponents vulnerable to the charge that it enables them to either postpone or provide an ad hoc rationale for highlighting who are the neediest subgroups within the veteran population. From this point of view, the advantage of flexibility can, therefore, be a disadvantage. Not surprisingly, it is easy to understand the heated discussions among policy makers and various stakeholders concerned with UK veterans (such as the service charities) about who are the “really needy” and deserving and who deserve priority in terms of scarce resources.

Yet these costs and benefits have to be weighed against those to be derived from the more exclusive definitions, which themselves are not free of difficulties. For example, requiring military personnel to complete basic training before qualifying for veteran status would meet some of the objections of those (mentioned above) who argue that this status requires not only a psychological commitment to meet the obligations entailed by the military contract by joining the military but also a technically qualified ability to do so, by passing through training successfully. However, although this definition might be more in accordance with public opinion and the views of some service charities and indeed those of military personnel themselves, as argued above, its less-inclusive nature might act as a disincentive to those who are not certain about their attitudes toward the military as a prospective employer.

More restrictive definitions, which, in effect, ask for not only ability but also performance of some kind of operational duty for personnel to qualify for veteran status, produce other problems. Australia provides a case in point.³² The advantages of such a definition are that it conforms to wider public perceptions of what constitutes a veteran

and, by focusing on a very specific population, provides a clear and distinctive role of the MoD in dealing with ex-service personnel so far as their making a special contribution to their country is concerned. This point also applies to the Dutch case, where the official view is that there is a clear delineation of the responsibilities of the MoD for its active-duty personnel and the services and facilities available for them. On the other hand, there are difficulties in defining the boundaries of what constitutes an operational tour, although one can (as in the case of the United States) vary benefits in terms of length and nature—including location—of service. A further difficulty is that this quite restrictive definition excludes from the official veterans community a range of personnel who, for a variety of reasons, may be exposed to conditions of social exclusion and who might benefit significantly from the support available to veterans.

This point raises an issue of principle as to whether veterans should be defined in terms of their having given some sacrifice, or a theoretical commitment to do so, even if they have, as in the case of the United Kingdom, been paid for only one day's service and may not have even passed out successfully from a program of training. And we have seen why this point of principle has been so significant in the British case. How has that principle been used in developing a strategy for responding to veterans' concerns?

Building on the Inclusive Definitions: The UK Strategy for Veterans

The current, inclusive definition of *veteran* is allied to a government strategy that has been termed the "Veterans Initiative," which is underpinned by five strategic themes: partnership, identity, recognition, education, and care. There is also an underpinning rationale that draws on both the business and the equity arguments rehearsed earlier.³³

The idea of partnership is to develop a more effective relationship between government and veterans organizations. As the MoD identifies and responds to veterans' needs, it argues that it will have to engage effectively with a range of intermediate organizations, including local authorities and the veterans organizations themselves, as well as a range of other nongovernmental organizations. It seeks to maintain better two-way links with veterans to monitor their health and social welfare as well as to target resources appropriately when and where serious problems occur.

Identity and *care* entail providing veterans with an increased sense of worth and a securer place in society, which will also have potentially positive effects on the recruitment and retention climate of both regular and reserve forces. In terms of recognition, it is keen to invest in the status of veterans (and hopes society will too). The objective is, through education, to encourage the wider society to develop a better understanding of veterans' achievements and to invest in their status. This effort, one aspect of which is an attempt to reinvigorate the public's memory of war, is part of an effort to improve civil-military understanding. Such understanding has become of increased significance because public knowledge and appreciation of what the military does and

has achieved has diminished in recent years. This has been caused by the passing of the national service generation, the decline in the number of opinion formers (not least in government) with military experience, and the downsizing of the armed forces, as well as its reduced presence or “footprint” in society, due to base closures and the rationalization of facilities. Finally, *care* means that veterans are supported by and integrated into society rather than being and/or feeling socially excluded, which not only gives rise to social and psychological problems but also undercuts the public’s positive perceptions of the armed services. This is linked to the MoD’s duty of care: to treat veterans as a “good employer” would.³⁴

These five strategic themes provide the UK government with a cross-departmental, integrated approach to veterans’ needs such as health, employment, and homelessness, which in the past were dealt with in a fragmented fashion and on the basis of inadequate data. Indeed, there remains insufficient evidence on various dimensions of veterans’ needs and on where there are particular areas of concern such as the nature and scale of ex-service homelessness and employment prospects after a year or more of postservice life. These gaps in data, which have become politically charged through the publicity about veterans’ concerns discussed earlier, have stimulated government into investing in a firmer research and evidence base to inform its approach to veterans. Yet there are other issues concerning the government’s approach to veterans that will not necessarily be resolved by improved evidence: there remain issues of principle that give rise to important policy dilemmas, to which we now turn in our conclusion.

Conclusion: Policy Dilemmas—Present and Future

The current UK government definition of *veteran* and the strategy for veterans that underpins it have gone some way to dispel the historical tradition of “goodbye and good luck” that has characterized the evolution of British civil-military relations. This conceptual and strategic approach has distinct advantages of flexibility. As a result, the vulnerable, “at-risk” groups are not left out of the veterans community and can, indeed, be targeted with resources.

However, as pointed out earlier, designing flexible packages of assistance for specific target groups within the broadly defined veterans community will still need a convincing rationale that establishes legitimate priorities among the competing claims of different subgroups. And this is a genuine problem: there are many such claims, each in its own way legitimate.

Consider, for example, the issue of the veterans who are most in need, which causes heated debate among service charities and other stakeholders engaged in representing and/or providing services for UK veterans. Disagreements about the priority areas for the targeting of scarce resources continue: should they be focused on the successful subgroup (in fact, the great majority judging by the available data) for whom the military has been a largely positive experience?³⁵ Or should, instead, resources be targeted

toward the disadvantaged, that is, those who have problems that can reasonably be attributed to service in the armed forces?

Another possibility is to focus attention on the vulnerable, whom the MoD can help because it is in a position to do so even though their vulnerability cannot reasonably be attributed to military service.³⁶ For example, those most vulnerable during the transition period from service to civilian life historically have not been eligible for the full resettlement package given to service leavers, precisely because their time in the armed forces has not been as successful as some of their peers. Current efforts to address this problem attempt to steer between reciprocating the sacrifices of those who have served and dealing with the vulnerable veterans who have arguably not made such a significant contribution to their nation.

To take another example, there is currently considerable concern about the percentage (as yet unknown, but some estimates put this at 5 to 6 percent) of the UK prison population who have an ex-services background.³⁷ It could be argued that veterans deserve assistance less for their unique social status connected with military service and more because they (or some of them) fall into the category of the socially excluded to which the government is committed to help. Underlying these possibilities are fundamental issues of principle at the heart of the strategy for veterans: to focus on those who are considered to be deserving because of the sacrifices they have given or those who are needy and vulnerable. These categories may overlap empirically to some extent, but where they do not, controversy over resources and legitimacy is inevitable.

Finally, there are controversial issues connected with whether the focus of attention should be on what might be termed “lag” or “lead” variables. That is, should the emphasis be on compensating existing veterans for their past services and, where appropriate, mitigating the conditions of social exclusion in which some find themselves? Or, instead, should one use scarce resources to intervene proactively and preventatively on behalf of “tomorrow’s veterans”? Such an intervention would serve not only to maximize the protective features of military life and minimize the factors exposing military personnel to risks of future social exclusion but also to target resources toward the most at-risk groups—for example, those who are discharged from the military early for medical or other reasons.

The inclusive definition underpinning current UK government strategy for veterans brings in its train the difficult work of resolving such dilemmas and providing justifications that meet the concerns of the major interest groups involved. In all of this, unavoidably, some will be disappointed, which, in turn, will pose further challenges for those in and outside government whose aim is to design a system of care for UK veterans that is closer to the ideal of which previous generations have fallen short.

Notes

1. These features set the military apart from other high-risk organizations such as the police and fire services, although this view is not universally accepted. See the useful discussion in S. Soeters, A. Weibull, and D. Winslow, “Military Culture,” in *Handbook of the Sociology of the Military*, ed. G. Caforio (New York: Plenum, 2003), 237–54. This contract varies between states that rely on conscripts and those that rely on vol-

unteers for their personnel. The all-volunteer force has become the master trend for modern Western armed services since the 1950s and especially since the end of the cold war. See J. Burk, "Military Mobilization in Modern Societies," in *Handbook of the Sociology of the Military*, ed. G. Caforio (New York: Plenum, 2003), 111-30; and K. W. Haltiner, "The Decline of the European Mass Armies," in *Handbook of the Sociology of the Military*, ed. G. Caforio (New York: Plenum, 2003), 361-84.

2. On housing, see, for example, Richard Tessler, Robert Rosenheck, and Gail Gamache, "Homeless Veterans of the All-Volunteer Force: A Social Selection Perspective," *Armed Forces & Society* 29, no. 4 (2003): 509-24.

3. The relevant details include the following: *U.S. (pop. 292 million) definition*: The Department of Veterans Affairs defines *veteran* as one who is currently on active duty in the U.S. Armed Forces, has honorably served on active duty in the U.S. Armed Forces for at least two years, is currently serving on Army Reserve or National Guard duty, or is a dependent of a qualified veteran, that is, deceased or 100 percent disabled owing to service-connected causes, under chapter 35 of the Federal Regulations. Note, the U.S. Department of Education defines *veteran* differently. Federal regulations governing Title IV financial-aid programs define *veteran* as one who has engaged in active service in the U.S. Armed Forces (army, navy, air force, marines, and coast guard) or was a cadet or midshipman at one of the service academies and was released under a condition other than dishonorable; *University of North Carolina Veterans Service Handbook*, <http://www.uncw.edu/finaid/Veterans/index.htm> (accessed June 1, 2004). Veteran population in the United States and Puerto Rico is 26,549,704; Department of Veterans Affairs, <http://www.va.gov/vetdata/Census2000/index.htm> (accessed June 1, 2004). *Australian (pop. 19.8 million) definition*: A veteran is a person who has eligible war service or to whom a pension is payable in respect of injury or death resulting from an occurrence after July 31, 1962, as a result of action by hostile forces or warlike operations against hostile forces, outside Australia, as a member of the Australian Defence Force. A veteran includes a person who had continuous full-time service as a member of the Defence Force during World War I or World War II, was an Australian mariner during World War II, had operational service, served in an operational area and was allotted for duty, was a member of a unit that was allotted for duty in that operational area, has warlike or nonwarlike service, or is a Commonwealth or Allied veteran who was domiciled in Australia immediately before his or her appointment or enlistment and who rendered continuous full-time service in an operational area. Under certain conditions, some civilians who served during World War I or World War II are also veterans. Commonwealth or Allied veterans and mariners are eligible for service pension if they have qualifying service. There are currently 521,700 veterans in Australia according to the 2003 annual report of the Department of Veterans Affairs. *Canadian (pop. 31.49 million) definition*: There was never a definition of *veteran* prior to 2000 for the Royal Canadian Legion and prior to 2001 for Department of Veterans Affairs (VAC). Even the Canadian Pension Act does not have a definition of *veteran*. In early 2000, the Royal Canadian Legion introduced a definition that reads as follows: "A veteran is any person who is serving or who has honourably served in the Armed Forces of Canada, the Commonwealth or its wartime allies: or who has served in the Merchant Navy or Ferry Command during wartime." In 2001, the VAC and the Department of National Defence (DND) extended veteran status to former Canadian forces members and reserve force members who meet DND's military occupational classification requirements and who have been released from the forces with an honorable discharge; Royal Canadian Legion Web site, http://www.legion.ca/asp/docs/home/faq_e.asp (accessed June 15, 2004); Veterans Affairs Performance Report for the period ending March 31, 2003, http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/rma/dpr/02-03/VA-AC/VA-AC03D_e.asp (accessed June 16, 2004). The VAC pays benefits in one form or another to some 209,000 veterans according to their 2003 Performance Report, Veterans Affairs Performance Report for the period ending March 31, 2003, http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/rma/dpr/02-03/VA-AC/VA-AC03D_e.asp (accessed June 16, 2004). *U.K. (pop. 59.2 million) definition*: All those who have served in the armed services including widows/widowers and dependants, *all of whom* are included in the veterans community.

4. A. Wyatt, *Development of the Veterans Initiative by the Ministry of Defence, Case Study* (Sunningdale Park, UK: The International Comparisons in Policy Making Team, International Public Service Group, Cabinet Office's Centre for Management and Policy Studies, the Civil Service College, March 2002), 10. As one of our Australian interviewees put it, "Only in one War (World War II) did war come to Australia; in the Boer War, World War I, the Korean War, the Malayan conflicts, the Vietnam War, the Gulf War and the current War on Terrorism, our people went away to fight. So in Australia we often say 'he is a returned man', meaning

that he has returned from war, and our equivalent of your British Legion is called the Returned and Services League. The evolution of this type of definition was historical more than an act of conscious policy—it arose because of World War I.”

5. Wyatt, *Development of the Veterans Initiative*, 10.

6. Personal communication with Professor Hugh Smith. On Australia, see also <http://www.ausvets.powerup.com.au/>. Interview with Ministry of Defence (MoD) officials.

7. See the discussion in B. Boene, C. Dandeker, J. Kuhlmann, and J. van der Meulen, *Facing Uncertainty: The Swedish Military in International Perspective* (Karlstad, Sweden: National Defence College, Department of Leadership, 2000), 129-75.

8. See H. Strachan, *Politics of the British Army* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon, 1997), 195-233; and H. Strachan, “The Civil-Military ‘Gap’ in Britain,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 26 (2003): 43-63.

9. H. Stanhope, *The Soldiers: An Anatomy of the British Army* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1979), 281 (emphasis added).

10. It is no coincidence that the dominant tradition of farewell and neglect has been accompanied by a lack of sustained scientific interest in what happens to ex-service personnel since the Second World War. Before 1945, there was a good deal of interests, while afterward, it became conspicuous by its absence, partly because of the gradual decline of medical services within the armed forces and the corresponding neglect of academic research. Consequently, there is a paucity of robust social and psychological research. Large-scale comprehensive study of the health effects of a particular campaign did not take place until after the Gulf War (1990-1991); C. Unwin, N. Blatchley, W. Coker, S. Ferry, M. Hotopf, L. Hull, K. Ismail, I. Palmer, A. David, and S. Wessely, “The Health of United Kingdom Servicemen who Served in the Persian Gulf War,” *Lancet* 353 (1999): 169-78. This study was funded by the U.S. Department of Defense and was only later supplemented by a UK-funded study; N. Cherry, F. Creed, A. Silman, G. Dunn, D. Baxter, J. Smedley, S. Taylor, and G. Macfarlane, “Health and Exposures of United Kingdom Gulf War Veterans. Part I: The Pattern and Extent of Ill Health,” *Occupational and Environmental Medicine* 58 (2001): 291-98.

11. N. Barr, “Veterans,” in *The Oxford Companion to Military History*, ed. R. Holmes (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2001), 950 (emphasis added).

12. *Ibid.*, 951.

13. Wyatt, *Development of the Veterans Initiative*, paragraph 2.

14. *Ibid.*, 9.

15. These views were expressed in interviews conducted by the authors. Christopher Dandeker, Simon Wessely, Amy Iversen, and John Ross, *Improving the Delivery of Cross-Departmental Support and Services for Veterans* (Joint Report of the Department of War Studies and Institute of Psychiatry, King's College London, to the UK MoD, July 2003), http://www.mod.uk/publications/vets_svcs/index.html.

16. See details at <http://www.va.gov/pubaff/fedben/Fedben.pdf>; see also Wyatt, *Development of the Veterans Initiative*, 9. Wyatt observes that the “USA has a two-tier system which differentiated between those who have served only in their own country and those who have been in operations overseas. It also gives additional recognition to veterans with more than 20 years service. The UK does not differentiate between location, type and length of service;” Wyatt, *Development of the Veterans Initiative*, 13. It is also important to bear in mind the wider institutional differences between the United States and the United Kingdom since 1945. One of the main drivers for a veterans program in the United States was the lack of universal health care; the presence of this via the National Health Service is, in turn, the main argument against such a provision in the United Kingdom.

17. This definition was formulated in 1990, when the Dutch Ministry of Defense published its memorandum on veterans.

18. A report by the homeless charity Crisis estimates that 25 percent of rough sleepers had served in the armed forces, while a further report by the Social Exclusion Unit highlighted that between a quarter and one-fifth of rough sleepers had once served. See S. Ballintyne and S. Hanks, *Lest We Forget: Ex-Servicemen and Homelessness* (London: Crisis, December 2000); and Social Exclusion Unit, *Rough Sleeping*, <http://www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/seu/index/publishe/htm>. However, these figures should be treated with caution; for example, officials in the Veterans Affairs secretariat within the MoD estimate that a more realistic figure would be nearer 12 percent.

19. The duty-of-care theme continues to generate public interest and debate, not least as a result of the controversy surrounding the deaths of trainee soldiers at the Deepcut military base. See the inquiry into Deepcut by the Surrey police at http://www.surreypolice.org.uk/deepcut_final.pdf. Indeed, the House of Commons Select Committee on Defence is holding an inquiry on the subject. See the terms of reference that were announced in April 2004, at http://www.parliament.uk/parliamentary_committees/defence_committee/def190304__no__17.cfm.

20. A recent high-court decision that a former soldier who claims to have Gulf War Syndrome is entitled to a war pension means other veterans can make the same claim; S. Randall, *Falling Out* (London: Crisis, 1994); and G. Gunner and H. Knott, *Homeless on Civvy Street* (London: PS Opinion Research, 1997).

21. See Seymour Leventman, "Official Neglect of Vietnam Veterans," *Journal of Social Issues* 31, no. 4 (1975): 171-81.

22. On the tensions between valuing the sacrifices of veterans and valuing budgetary constraints, see Wilbur J. Scott, "PTSD and Agent Orange: Implications for a Sociology of Veterans' Issues," *Armed Forces & Society* 18 (Summer 1992): 592-612.

23. Social exclusion using the framework identified by the Better Regulation Taskforce (protecting vulnerable people) and the Social Exclusion Unit's "Preventing Social Exclusion" but modified for the particular situation of veterans; Social Exclusion Unit, *Report 1998* (London: Rough Sleepers Unit).

24. Interview with MoD officials.

25. See the discussion in Dandeker et al., *Improving the Delivery*.

26. Although the UK armed services have been reduced by 35 percent over the past decade, they still face the challenge of recruiting and retaining personnel. Just now, recruitment is satisfactory, with the real concern being to ensure that the level of quality is maintained during the processes of recruitment and retention. For the total of UK armed services, the figures indicate a 6,720 deficit in other ranks with the officer corps falling short by 210. The overall level of personnel for the armed services is 164,850. The single-service shortages are as follows. The 2003 army soldier deficit is 4,940 while there is a surplus of officers of 90. This compares with the Royal Navy, which has deficits of 830 other ranks and 80 officers. For the Royal Air Force, there is a 950 deficit in other ranks but a surplus of 200 officers. See Defence Analytical Services Agency (MoD agency), *UK Defence Statistics*, <http://www.dasa.mod.uk/natstats/ukds/2003/chap2frame.html>.

27. See Patricia M. Shields, "A New Paradigm for Military Policy: Socio-Economics," *Armed Forces & Society* 19, no. 4 (Summer 1993): 511-32.

28. Interviews with Dutch and French Ministry of Defense officials and discussions with Professor B. Boone, dean of Military Academy, St Cyr, France.

29. On the utility of business and equity arguments in interpreting other aspects of personnel issues in the armed services, such as the recruitment of members of minority ethnic communities, see C. Dandeker and D. Mason, "Diversifying the Uniform? The Participation of Minority Ethnic Personnel in the British Armed Services," *Armed Forces & Society* 30, no. 1 (Fall 2003): 481-507. On the case of women, see C. Dandeker and M. Wechsler Segal, "Gender Integration in Armed Forces: Recent Policy Developments in the United Kingdom," *Armed Forces & Society* 23, no. 1 (Fall 1996): 29-47.

30. Service charities, including the Royal British Legion, Combat Stress, and the Soldiers', Sailors', Airmen and Families Association were interviewed as part of the King's College study; Dandeker et al., *Improving the Delivery*.

31. Interviews with MoD officials.

32. The international dimension of this discussion draws on Dandeker et al., *Improving the Delivery*, 19-30.

33. Communication Strategy for Veterans, MoD, September 2003, C30.

34. As far as the authors are concerned, each of these components will require its own microstrategy: for example, and controversially, at least for some stakeholders, priority has been given to targeting resources to those veterans who are most vulnerable to social exclusion. In this context, care is about not only repair but also prevention by seeking to do more to protect the vulnerable while in service and as they leave; targeting and assisting the vulnerable once they leave and "sign-posting" problem cases for other departments so that even where the problems are not MoD or service attributable, they are picked up by other departments before they become even more expensive problems to fix.

35. D Resettlement, *Fourth Annual Report* (MoD with Coutts Consulting Group, 2001-2002); A. Iversen, V. Nikolaou, N. Greenberg, C. Unwin, L. Hull, M. Hotopf, C. Dandeker, J. Ross, and S. Wessely, "What Happens to British Veterans When They Leave the Armed Forces?" *European Journal of Public Health* 15, no. 2 (2005): 175-84. Of service personnel, 85 percent are in employment six months after leaving the armed forces. However, on a cautionary note, what happens after that is unclear.

36. These useful distinctions between the "successful," "disadvantaged," and "vulnerable" veterans were developed in early discussions and drafts of the strategy for veterans.

37. See Dandeker et al., *Improving the Delivery*, 51.

Christopher Dandeker is a professor of military sociology in the Department of War Studies, King's College London, and codirector of the King's Centre for Military Health Research. He researches and publishes widely on military personnel issues and civil-military relations. His most recent publications include (with David Mason) "Diversifying the Uniform? The Participation of Minority Ethnic Personnel in the British Armed Services" (*Armed Forces & Society*, vol. 30, no. 1, 2003, 481-507), and "Building Flexible Forces for the 21st Century: Key Challenges for the Contemporary Armed Services," in *Handbook of the Sociology of the Military* (ed. G. Caforio; New York: Plenum, 2003). *Address for correspondence*: Christopher Dandeker, King's College London, Strand, Department of War Studies, London WC2R 2LS, United Kingdom; e-mail: christophe.dandeker@kc.ac.uk.

Simon Wessely is a professor of epidemiological and liaison psychiatry at the Institute of Psychiatry, King's College London, and codirector of the King's Centre for Military Health Research with Christopher Dandeker. He trained in medicine at Cambridge and Oxford and then became a clinical psychiatrist at the Maudsley Hospital, London. His doctorate is in epidemiology. He has published over 300 research papers, largely concerning the overlap between medicine and psychiatry exemplified by such conditions as chronic fatigue syndrome, Gulf War Syndrome, and other contested diagnoses. For the past few years, he has specialized in several aspects of military health. His latest book is a new history of military psychiatry written with Edgar Jones. *E-mail*: s.wessely@iop.kcl.ac.uk.

Amy Iversen is a specialist registrar in psychiatry and a clinical research fellow at the King's Centre for Military Health Research. She has a special interest in the health needs of veterans. Her most recent publication is "'Goodbye and Good Luck': The Mental Health Needs and Treatment Experiences of British Ex-service Personnel" (*British Journal of Psychiatry* 186 (2005): 480-486). *E-mail*: a.iversen@iop.kcl.ac.uk.

John Ross is a research student in the Department of War Studies at King's College London having previously served in the army and Royal Air Force. He also works as a consultant and analyst on military affairs and the personnel issues of the armed forces. He is a member of the British Commission for Military History, and as a military historian, he conducts battlefield tours for a number of military units. *E-mail*: ross068@msn.com.