
Defense Report

AUSA



General Officers—How Many are Needed?

In this era of defense budget cuts, there are calls for reduction in the size of the officer corps, especially in general officer grades. Those who suggest this approach assert that the excessive number of general officers is a well-recognized problem; recognized by some and perceived by others, but is the "problem" documented?

Generally, the basis of the statement is a comparison between the ratio of general officers to other service personnel during the peak mobilization period of World War II and conditions that exist today. This erroneously compares the fully expanded wartime organization with a peacetime organization prepared to expand as necessary. By far the greatest increases in any expansion are in the junior ranks, altering significantly the ratio of general officers to other ranks.

In the past, general officers were used primarily in their historic role of leading and controlling forces in battle. Today their responsibilities are far broader and hence the requirement for them is far greater. In addition to command and control of combat forces, responsibilities include management of extensive logistic and intelligence systems; management of research and development and procurement of the wide variety of equipment needed to field a modern Army; management of career-long military training and education of enlisted/officer personnel; service on joint-service and international staffs worldwide, including the Department of Defense and NATO; and participation in politico-military affairs—attachés to our major allies, service on treaty negotiation teams and construction of facilities in friendly countries where high-level contact is required.

Annual reviews are accomplished to validate each general officer position. Currently, the Army has 97 positions to which a general officer should be assigned; however, due to limitations imposed by Congress, positions are filled by colonels. A comparison with our NATO allies seems to confirm that rather than being excessive, the number of Army general officers is too small. With the exception of the Federal Republic of Germany, the ratio of U.S. general officers (about six to 10,000) is smaller than all other NATO countries.