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RESEARCH BRIEF

What Are the Air Force's Manpower Requirements?

A New Methodology Improves the Estimation Process

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Every few years, the U.S. Air Force reviews its manpower requirements to ensure that it is planning for enough people with the right skills and experience to meet national security demands. The most recent review was the Total Force Assessment (TFA), the first phase of which was carried out from 1999 to 2001. TFA-I was based on the traditional assumption that the Air Force should be able to prosecute two major theater wars (MTWs) at the same time. In recent years, however, defense planners have considered the need to estimate manpower requirements for smaller scenarios of between one and two MTWs. In such cases, presumably not all existing forces would actually be used, and manpower needs might vary. As of 2001, the Air Force lacked a sanctioned method of estimating requirements for these smaller scenarios.

RAND Project AIR FORCE (PAF) observed the TFA-I process and developed an improved methodology for estimating manpower requirements. The main features of the methodology are as follows:

- **As intended, the methodology can estimate manpower requirements for MTW-sized scenarios, and in particular those short of two MTWs.**
- **The methodology is flexible enough to accommodate a variety of policy assumptions.** For example, a key question in moving from a two-MTW scenario to smaller scenarios is what to do with untasked forces. The Air Force might consider using such personnel to maintain an overseas forward presence. PAF's methodology can incorporate such assumptions into its estimate of total manpower requirements. Another potential policy issue is whether the Air Force can reduce manpower requirements by extending the longer wartime workweek for support personnel to a larger segment of the population. PAF's methodology would be able to estimate the potential benefits of such a policy.
- **The methodology avoids the double counting of personnel.** Overall manpower requirements are a combination of peacetime and wartime needs. TFA-I followed traditional practice by taking current authorizations (in the Manpower Data System) as peacetime requirements and using time-phased force deployment data (TPFDD) to represent strategic planning guidance for wartime requirements. Without appropriate adjustments, however, this method can double count positions that appear in both the peacetime and wartime columns (as with personnel who switch jobs between peacetime and wartime). PAF modified the TFA-I methodology to avoid this potential problem. The new methodology follows TFA-I by assigning peacetime manpower to four basic categories: deployable forces, in-place combat forces, continuing missions (e.g., headquarters, depots, and training), and support. Unlike TFA-I, it extends the same categories to TPFDD positions to achieve greater consistency. Along with further adjustments for untasked personnel and other considerations, the new methodology can present a more accurate picture of total manpower needs.

A Centralized Process Can Improve Future Exercises

In addition to developing an improved methodology, PAF made some observations about the overall process for conducting total force assessments. A major lesson learned from TFA-I is the need to exercise greater control and to have a detailed auditing trail of the process. This could be accomplished by centralizing the initial assessment of manpower needs and the final analysis and reporting of results. TFA-I looked to functional area managers (FAMs) in the major commands to furnish manpower requirements, creating the potential for inconsistent classification of personnel and lack of an auditing trail for major decisions. PAF suggests that a handful of experts make initial manpower assignments and then solicit input from FAMs. Greater control over the process will ensure that methodologies such as PAF's will be most effective at providing more accurate estimates of future manpower needs. ■

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