

Reserve Component General and Flag Officer Requirements

Increased use of the reserve component, particularly since September 11, 2001, has renewed interest in the question of whether the number of reserve component general and flag officers (RC G/FOs) is appropriate. Interest in this question prompted Congress to ask the Secretary of Defense, through the Fiscal Year 2014 National Defense Authorization Act, to conduct a review of “general and flag officer requirements for members of the reserve component in an active status . . . to ensure that the authorized strengths . . . are based on an objective requirements process,” are sufficient, and reflect any efficiencies that can be gained by eliminating or downgrading unneeded positions.

The Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs asked the RAND Corporation to assist with this assessment by answering the following research questions.

- Does the current system of authorized strength applicable to RC G/FOs, including exemptions, provide for a sufficient quantity of senior officers? Should alternatives to the current system be considered?
- Are the military departments appropriately managing and accounting for RC G/FO requirements, authorizations, authorized strength, and inventory?
- Are there candidate positions that could be considered for elimination, downgrading to a lower rank, or conversion to senior civilian positions?
- To what extent should the need to provide developmental experiences for RC G/FOs drive requirements?

Terms and Methods

Considering these questions requires clarification of several terms.

Requirements are positions that the services and Joint Staff designate for a general or flag officer of a particular grade. These positions are usually listed as such in a manpower document.

Authorizations are positions (requirements) that the secretary or chief of the service (for service authorizations) or the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (for joint authorizations) has decided to fill with a general or flag officer.

Authorized strength is the maximum number of general or flag officers established in law (for the active component, the reserve component, and each military department). This

Key findings:

Reviewing questions related to requirements for reserve component general and flag officers (RC G/FOs), RAND researchers found that current authorized strength and exemptions are sufficient to provide effective management and leadership. They found that management and justification of these positions are adequate, but that standardization across the services and implementation of tracking methods across the U.S. Department of Defense could help better evaluate and validate RC G/FO positions. RAND researchers also found relatively few possibilities for elimination, downgrading, or conversion of positions. Although development considerations should not drive RC G/FO requirements because adequate positions for officer development exist, care should be taken not to disproportionately eliminate positions considered crucial for development purposes.

includes both the basic authorized strength and additional strength authorized in exemptions.

Exemptions are conditional positions such that the general or flag officers holding them will not be counted against the statutory limits if the conditions are met. In the reserve component, for example, many exemptions apply to reserve officers serving in joint duty assignments.

General or flag officer inventory is the number of individuals who can be assigned to fill general or flag officer authorized positions.

In other words, *requirements* and *authorizations* reflect number of positions. *Authorized strength* is the number of people allowed to fill those positions. *Inventory* is the population available to fill the positions. These numbers may or may not be equal. In fact, *requirements* are generally greater than *authorizations*, and *authorizations* are generally less than or equal to *authorized strength*. This is because *requirements* are not constrained by *authorized strength*, while *authorizations* are.

At the time of this research, RC G/FO requirements numbered 634 positions, while authorized strength for these positions was 595—meaning the services were authorized to

fill only 595 of the stated 634 requirements. Generally, the services authorize RC G/FO positions near the limits of their authorized strength, but most of the time they will leave a small number of authorized positions unfilled to give personnel managers flexibility to respond to emerging requirements.

To answer the research questions, RAND researchers gleaned information from a number of sources:

- policy and legal documents guiding the authorizations and management of general and flag officers and positions
- previous studies on the requirements for general and flag officers
- interviews with subject-matter experts and stakeholders
- analysis of data collected from the military services on all RC G/FO positions.

In the remainder of this research brief, we review the results of our research and recommendations to the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) for further action.

Are Authorized Strength and Exemptions Sufficient?

The services report that RC G/FO authorized strength and exemptions are sufficient to provide effective management and leadership of the reserve component and to fulfill the varied roles in which RC G/FOs serve. The exemptions are necessary to meet the full range of RC G/FO requirements for such roles as performing joint duty, providing National Guard leadership at the state level, and filling skill gaps for general and flag officers in the active component. While particular requirements may be unfilled from time to time, there is no consistent type or set of requirements that the services are unable to fill because of limits on authorized strength.

As a result, the researchers recommend that Congress and DoD maintain the current system of basic authorized strength plus individual exemptions. While the general and flag officer management offices reported that the structure of the current system is complex and difficult to manage, the researchers did not find sufficient evidence to support changes to statute. The current categories of exemptions provide for necessary full-time, developmental, and leadership roles for RC G/FOs and give the services flexibility to use reserve component officers when responding to changing mission needs. A system that eliminated most exemptions and combined those positions into a single pool with the basic authorized strength would remove flexibility that is essential to effective use of these officers.

Are the Services Appropriately Managing and Accounting for RC G/FO Positions?

The services' current requirements and authorizations processes are objective and able to meet service needs but would benefit

from a systematic, comprehensive review process. The reserve components and joint organizations develop job descriptions for positions that should be filled by a general or flag officer. These consider the nature of the position's duties, magnitude of responsibility, span of control and scope of the resources managed, significance of actions and decisions, and importance of the mission to national security, among other characteristics.

There are no formal, consistent classification standards or guidelines that the services can use and reference. All the general and flag officer management offices claim that the military judgment of service and joint senior leaders is the single most important consideration for creating or validating a general or flag officer position.

RAND researchers found that differences in individual services on the appropriate roles for RC G/FOs could result in inconsistencies when designating these positions. Positions with similar responsibilities can be assigned to individuals at different grades depending on the service, which has the potential to be problematic—for example, when considering reducing RC G/FO positions across the services. The services could benefit from a review and validation of RC G/FO positions that would facilitate better coordination throughout DoD.

The services and the Joint Staff have appropriate and accurate methods for ensuring that they comply with statutory limitations on the number of general and flag officers, both in authorized strength and exemptions. But these methods are inconsistent. It took significant time and effort for RAND researchers to evaluate them and ensure that the services were adhering to statutory limitations and constraints on the use of exemptions.

While the management systems generally work, RAND researchers found opportunities for improvement. The researchers recommend that the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness (OUSDP&R) do the following:

- Develop guidelines for periodically reviewing and validating RC G/FO requirements. Previous studies emphasize the difficulties in determining how positions requiring general or flag officers are designated or how many officers are needed. RAND researchers recommend that OUSDP&R develop and release guidelines for evaluating and validating RC G/FO positions. The guidelines should encourage consistency across service and joint positions while recognizing individual mission needs of the services, Joint Chiefs of Staff, Office of the Secretary of Defense, and combatant commands. They should also encourage a formal, visible process for creating or validating general and flag officer positions.
- Institute methods for DoD-wide tracking of RC G/FO authorized strengths. The researchers recommend that OUSDP&R institute a departmentwide system for

tracking the 422 RC G/FOs provided for under the basic authorization and the individual categories of exemptions. With a common tracking system, OUSD(P&R) can more easily ensure that the number of RC G/FOs does not exceed statutory limitations and more accurately track the use of exemptions over time. A common tracking system should foster increased collaboration between active and reserve component general and flag officer management offices to share best practices in using authorizations and exemptions.

- Resist attempts to link RC G/FO limits to total service or component end strength. The size of the RC G/FO corps should not be tied to fluctuations in end strength or to the use of RC G/FOs in times of war or national emergency. Basing general and flag officer authorized strength on reserve component end strength could limit the use of RC G/FOs where they provide expertise, gain experience, and fill in for the active component but do not lead large numbers of troops. The researchers recommend that OUSD(P&R), the military departments, and the Joint Staff oppose limitations to RC G/FO authorized strengths based on end strength because such limitations would be counterproductive.

Can Positions Be Eliminated, Downgraded, or Converted?

There are opportunities to gain efficiencies by eliminating or downgrading a limited number of RC G/FO requirements. After evaluating 634 positions, RAND researchers identified between 27 and 95 positions that could be candidates for elimination or downgrading, depending on how stringently the services consider existing requirements. Before taking any action on these positions, however, the military departments should review and revalidate these positions as general or flag officer requirements, because contextual, qualitative, or other information not evident in the researchers' purely analytic process may justify the requirements.

The researchers found very few opportunities for converting RC G/FO requirements to senior civilian positions. The biggest impediment to such conversion is that many of these are part-time positions, making them impractical to fill with civilians. Many RC G/FO positions are also valuable for officer development—in fact, 65 percent of the reserve component positions on general staffs are identified as having value for RC G/FO professional development.

RAND researchers did identify one category of positions—mobilization assistants or National Guard assistants—for which the requirement for a general or flag officer needs to be reevaluated. These positions have loosely defined peacetime roles that can be generically described as liaisons between their commands and the reserve components, but their roles

upon mobilization are not well articulated. Therefore, it is difficult to determine when the positions need to be filled by a general or flag officer, whether a lower-ranking officer could satisfactorily perform these roles, or whether the positions should be eliminated. These positions constitute one-third of the RC G/FO requirements, not counting the state adjutants general and assistant adjutants general positions. Establishing overarching service policies and standards that address the expected peacetime and mobilization roles of these assistants could help justify them and assuage concerns. Because most of these positions are filled by individual mobilization augmentees (IMAs),¹ departmentwide guidance on how to use RC G/FO IMAs and the roles they should play would also help justify these requirements.

The RC G/FO requirements that have emerged since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, broadly reflect the needs of the past 15 years. Many of these requirements are closely related to enduring changes in force structure and organization, but others are more closely tied to evolving operational requirements. Such requirements should be reviewed regularly to ensure that limited general and flag officer resources are dedicated to the highest-priority missions.

To better justify existing requirements for RC G/FOs, the researchers recommend the following:

- The services and joint organizations should review positions identified in RAND's analysis to ensure that these remain valid RC G/FO requirements. Those that are no longer valid should be considered for elimination or downgrading.
- OUSD(P&R) should assist the services and the Joint Staff in establishing overarching guidance on how RC G/FO IMAs should be used and the roles they should play. While flexibility to tailor assignments is essential, there should be a common foundation establishing the basis for how all the services employ RC G/FO IMAs.
- OUSD(P&R) should assist the services in establishing guidance regarding the nature of positions described as mobilization assistants or National Guard assistants. There should be a common understanding of the duties and responsibilities associated with such positions both in peacetime and at times of mobilization. Such guidance should assist the services in validating and justifying these positions.
- The services and joint organizations should review RC G/FO requirements established during the past 15 years. Some of these requirements are clearly enduring but

¹ DoD Instruction (DoDI) 1235.11 of 2015 provides general guidance on the management of IMAs. According to the instruction, IMAs must be used to "support mobilization requirements, contingency operations, operations other than war, or other specialized or technical requirements." However, the instruction does not specifically address the appropriate roles for IMAs at the rank of general or flag officer.

others are tied to operational requirements in the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility. As these operations end or evolve, there may be opportunities to free RC G/FO resources for use elsewhere.

Should Professional Development Considerations Influence Requirements?

The most fundamental question the researchers considered regarding professional development was whether the services possess a sufficient array of jobs to create an adequate pool of well-rounded reserve component officers from which to select future leaders. If the services routinely lamented their inability to get officers a certain type of experience, or worried that their requirements were concentrated too heavily in a few areas to generate enough well-rounded leaders, there could be an argument for adjusting the requirements for RC G/FO positions in the name of professional development.

The researchers' findings do not suggest that this is the case, however. None of the offices or senior leaders with whom the researchers met, nor RAND's analysis of general and flag officer career paths, suggested any serious gaps in the ability to generate a sufficient number of qualified officers for more senior positions. There appears to be a sufficient range and diversity of positions to provide the necessary experiences. When constraints arise, they are usually a result of limitations in National Guard and reserve assignment processes, such as the location and availability of officers, not the absence of a particular job.

Professional development requirements, therefore, do not appear to offer clear or specific guidance for judging RC G/FO positions and should not drive requirements. Nevertheless, there are several aspects of development that can and should be taken into account by the services when considering changes to general and flag officer positions. Specifically, the researchers recommend the following:

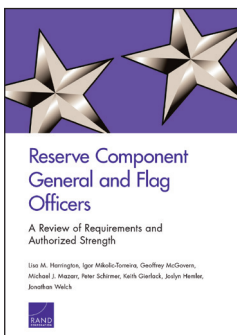
- Future reductions in general and flag officer requirements or authorizations should not disproportionately affect those positions viewed as developmentally crucial.

The services should strive to maintain a good balance of command, joint, headquarters staff, international, combatant command, major command, and other positions. The most common and important route to development for senior responsibilities is broadening the range of assignments that officers can hold. Cuts that fall disproportionately on less "core" or typical command assignments (such as general and flag officers assigned in the joint environment) could adversely affect the professional development of general and flag officers.

- Innovative and promising efforts are under way in the reserve components to enhance career-long leader development. Best practices, ideas, and insights from these efforts should continue to be shared among the services to catalyze further experimentation and innovation in general and flag officer development.

Conclusion

Managing and tracking RC G/FOs is a complex and dynamic process, driven by a combination of service requirements, authorizations from service and joint leadership to fill positions, authorized strength as defined in statutes, and available inventories of officers. Despite the challenges, the services are working within statutory limits and have relatively solid requirements processes, although these processes could be made more rigorous and consistent. In general, the reserve components have a sufficient number of general and flag officers to meet mission requirements and provide ample opportunity to future officers. The system of basic authorizations and numerous exemptions appears sufficient and serves the reserve components well. Combining exemptions into a single pool with basic authorized strength, by contrast, would create a rigid system and reduce flexibility that the reserve components need to meet changing requirements and fulfill their varied roles. While RAND researchers found a small number of RC G/FO positions that might be considered for downgrading or elimination after further review by the services, they determined that the vast majority of positions are well justified.



This brief describes work done in the RAND National Defense Research Institute and documented in *Reserve Component General and Flag Officers: A Review of Requirements and Authorized Strength*, by Lisa M. Harrington, Igor Mikolic-Torreira, Geoffrey McGovern, Michael J. Mazarr, Peter Schirmer, Keith Gierlack, Joslyn Hemler, and Jonathan Welch, RR-1156-OSD (available at www.rand.org/t/RR1156), 2016. To view this brief online, visit www.rand.org/t/RB9914. The RAND Corporation is a research organization that develops solutions to public policy challenges to help make communities throughout the world safer and more secure, healthier and more prosperous. RAND is nonprofit, nonpartisan, and committed to the public interest. RAND's publications do not necessarily reflect the opinions of its research clients and sponsors. RAND® is a registered trademark. © RAND 2016.

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