



Too Many Generals in Italy? No: They Are Fewer Than the NATO Average and Also the Lowest Paid. Let's Debunk This Myth Once and for All

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From time to time, the same accusation always resurfaces: *“there are too many Generals in Italy”*. It's an effective formula, **suitable for quick headlines and social media controversies**. We've seen it even in the comments, fortunately limited, that appeared under our Facebook post about the recent promotion of five Paratrooper Officers to the rank of Major General.

The point is that this narrative **does not hold up to data verification**. And the numbers, in this case, are clearer than any opinion.

How Many Generals Italy Really Has

The Italian Army currently has **about 170 Generals in active service**, against **about 100,000 total personnel**. This results in a ratio of **about one General for every 588 soldiers**.

This consistency **is not arbitrary**, but is **expressly regulated by law**. Specifically, the **D.Lgs. 66/2010 - Military Code**, in **article 809-bis** (effective from February 26, 2014), states verbatim:

1. The overall organic allocations for the ranks of general and colonel are as follows:

- a) army corps generals and equivalents: **17**;*
- b) division generals and equivalents: **44**;*
- c) brigade generals and equivalents: **109**.*

The maximum total provided is therefore **170 general officers**.

In international comparison, this figure falls **within the range commonly found in NATO armies**, where the ratio between General officers and personnel tends to be **between one General for every 450 and 550 soldiers**, depending on the size of the armed forces, the command structure, interforce assignments, and contribution to permanent NATO positions.

No anomaly therefore emerges, nor an “inflation” of top ranks: the Italian Army's Generals are **legally determined, functionally justified, and aligned with allied standards**.

The comparison with other European NATO armies further reinforces this picture:

- **Poland (Wojska Lądowe):** about **70,000-75,000 personnel** and **120-140 Generals**, with an estimated ratio of **one General for every ~520-600 soldiers**.
- **France (Armée de Terre):** about **118,000 personnel** and **250-260 Generals**, with an estimated ratio **higher** than Italy, around **one General for every ~450-470 soldiers**.
- **Germany (Bundeswehr Heer):** about **62,000 personnel** and **170-190 Generals**, with a ratio **significantly higher** than Italy, around **one General for every ~330-360 soldiers**.
- **Spain (Ejército de Tierra):** about **75,000 personnel** and **140-160 Generals**, with an estimated ratio of **one General for every ~470-540 soldiers**.

- **Netherlands (Royal Netherlands Army):** about **25,000 personnel** and **45-55 Generals**, with an estimated ratio of **one General for every ~450-550 soldiers**.
- **Belgium (Land Component):** about **25,000 personnel** and **40-50 Generals**, with an estimated ratio of **one General for every ~500-620 soldiers**.

The conclusion, on a comparative level, is straightforward: **Italy is not the country with the most Generals**, neither in absolute terms nor, especially, **in relation to personnel**.

“Too Many Generals”: Where the Myth Comes From

The idea stems from a **dated journalistic narrative**, often repeated without checks, suggesting that Italy is “hypertrophic” in military leadership. In some cases, the story has included non-existent tales, becoming viral and **never truly removed from the public imagination**.

The mechanism is recurrent:

- **confusing Generals in service with those retired;**
- **improperly summing Army, Navy, Air Force, Carabinieri, and Guardia di Finanza;**
- **ignoring interforce structures and positions connected to NATO setups.**

The result is an artificially inflated number, far from organizational and operational reality.

And About Salaries? Another Often Misrepresented Point

There is also a second theme, often used to reinforce indignation: remuneration.

Here too, it is worth being precise.

In Italy, the gross annual base salary of a general officer varies approximately between **110,000** and **140,000 euros depending on the rank (brigade, division, or army corps general)**, net of variable allowances related to the positions held. These values derive from the application of parametric tables provided by the **DPRs implementing economic agreements for Armed Forces personnel** (in particular **DPR March 24, 2025, n. 52**, and previous **DPR 45/2022** and **DPR 39/2018**), which regulate the economic treatment of military executives.

At equal rank and responsibility, these levels are **lower** than those of many European counterparts.

In the **Armée de Terre** (France), the base salaries of general officers are generally in a range **between 130,000 and 170,000 euros annually**, with higher peaks for top ranks. In the **British Army** (United Kingdom), generals receive even higher salaries: for equivalent ranks, the annual base is **between about 160,000 and over 200,000 euros**, depending on the position.

Also in the **Bundeswehr Heer** (Germany), the salary range for general officers is generally higher than the Italian one, ranging **between about 140,000 and 180,000 euros annually**. In smaller countries but strongly integrated into NATO structures, like the **Belgian Land Component** (Belgium) and the **Royal Netherlands Army** (Netherlands), generals' salaries are still **at higher or aligned levels with the mid-high European range**, generally **between 130,000 and 165,000 euros annually**.

At equal responsibility, Italian Generals are thus placed in the **lowest range of the European comparison**, confirming that the problem is not excess, but the gap between **public perception and real data**.

But Do We Have All These Divisions and Army Corps?

The answer is that the number of general officers **is not mechanically linked** to the existence of divisions or army corps deployed on the ground. In modern Armed Forces, indeed, **many positions can only be filled by Brigade, Division, or Army Corps Generals**, regardless of the presence of a “classic” large unit under their command.

This is the case for numerous positions at the Army General Staff, interforce General Staffs, non-operational commands, planning bodies, and especially **positions in NATO and multinational contexts**, where the rank is not a formality but a functional and hierarchical requirement.

It should also be remembered that **in the last two decades, the overall number of Italian generals has been progressively reduced**, as part of staff reforms and the downsizing of the military instrument, reaching today **very contained levels compared to real operational, command, and international representation needs**.

Over the years, promotions to the rank of **Brigade General** have become progressively more restrictive. An emblematic figure is represented by the **172nd Course of the Modena Academy**, where a **historic low** was recorded, with the promotion, in 2020, of **only 11 Brigade Generals**.

Therefore, talking about an “excess” of generals, without considering these contexts, means reading the Armed Forces while ignoring the real criteria of contemporary defense.

The Comparison with the USA

The comparison with the USA might also support those who say “*proportionally we have more*”, **but only if you stop at the raw data**. In the United States, indeed, the number of *general and flag officers* (O-7–O-10) is **limited by law** and, as of **June 30, 2025**, there were 838 (out of a maximum authorized of 857), against about **1.32 million** active-duty personnel: practically **about 1 general for every 1,576 soldiers**.

The point, however, is the NATO context: the USA often occupies the **top roles** and “concentrates” many leadership positions, while allies, including Italy, mainly cover **intermediate and subordinate levels** (vice-commands, staff, components).

And in a pyramid structure, **the lower you go, the more positions increase**: this is also why the generals/personnel ratio can appear higher **without automatically indicating an anomaly or waste**.

Why This Topic Is Important

Repeating the narrative of “too many generals” produces two concrete and negative effects: **it weakens the credibility of the command chain, precisely when national security and deterrence are becoming central again, and lowers the level of debate, replacing fact-checking with slogans**.

In a NATO context, with multinational missions, increasing interoperability, and widespread responsibilities, the issue is not “cutting for the sake of it”, **but understanding how a modern Armed Force really works** and how it compares with its peers.

No, Italy does not have too many Generals. If anything, the opposite is true: **numbers in hand, the Italian model falls within allied normality** and shows a strongly balanced setup.

In a world accustomed to fast scrolling and catchy headlines, the myth persists mainly because **rarely does anyone verify what the data actually says.**