

# Code of Military Justice needs to be updated for 21st century

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The scandal at Lackland AFB was summed up best to us by a trainer who had reported the sexual misconduct of his

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Rep. Jackie Speier (center), D-Calif., holds a news conference last week with House Armed Services Committee members Loretta Sanchez (left), D-Calif., and Susan Davis, D-Calif., outside Lackland after meeting with base personnel.



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peers. He simply told us, "It's so much harder to do the right thing."

The very core of military service is to do the right thing, to make the ultimate sacrifice, if necessary.

There is great shame in knowing that military trainers, or MTI, had become sexual predators, preying on young trainees for years without repercussions.

Trainers who finally came forward with the truth were subsequently ostracized by those who had looked the other way for years.

It is obvious that the military justice system must be re-examined.

The Lackland sex abuse scandal is now the most horrific in recent times with more than 40 young patriotic women trainees falling victim to as many as 19 instructors. The Air Force would like to believe the problem is the fault of a few bad apples.

It's so much more than that.

Any closed, hierarchical institution with an internal justice system and a "keep it in the family" mind-set can unwittingly promote criminal behavior.

The stigma of reporting a crime committed by an MTI became worse than the crime itself.

There should be strict accountability for any MTI who has sex with his or her trainee. Period. There is clearly no consent when a training instructor tells you to do something in an environment where the student is at his mercy 24/7.

The trainees we met were 18, 19 years old — the same age as one of our daughters. They wouldn't be any more equipped to handle sexual advances made by a sexual predator than these young women were equipped to handle advances or inappropriate behavior by

their instructors. The liability rests not with the victims of abuse but with the MTIs who abuse their authority and the military if it protects their behavior.

Two victims were friends in the same class and never talked about their assaults until after they left basic training. They told us they "worried about getting in trouble."

The intimidation and reprisals cannot be understated. "Where are my bitches? Daddy's home" — that's what one predator told his female flight trainees.

With 10 known victims, he was given a 20-year sentence that can be reduced to a little more than six years with good behavior.

The Air Force prosecution, to their credit, had asked that he be sentenced to 40 years.

But here's the problem: In military court, a jury of the predator's peers approves the sentence, not the judge, as in civilian court.

The Uniformed Code of Military Justice, created by Congress in the 1950s, must be updated to meet the needs of the 21st-century military where 20 percent of new enlistees are women.

Congress can give military leadership the tools it needs to handle sex crimes in a fair manner, but only if lawmakers are persuaded that the UCMJ should be a living document, not a sacred cow.

Our discussions highlighted recommendations that should be implemented immediately: more rigorous screening for MTIs, limited MTI shifts to 12-hour days, MTIs should serve in their position for no more than three years, and all MTIs should be required to meet biannually with behavioral specialists.

We are encouraged that there will be an improved climate at Lackland for a while.

Col. [Mark Camerer](#) is genuine in his commitment to ensure the safety of all trainees under his command.

But in the long run, good intentions will be lost without real cultural and institutional change.

We owe our sons and daughters no less.

Rep. Jackie Speier, D-Calif., Rep. Susan Davis, D-Calif., and Rep. Loretta Sanchez, D-Calif., serve on the House Armed Services Committee.