

Our Soldiers Must be Able to Defend Themselves

Last week, in an act of jihadist terror, Mohammad Youssuf Abdulazeed opened fire at a Navy recruiting center and a Navy and Marines Reserve Center in Chattanooga, TN, killing four Marines and one naval officer. These five brave soldiers were unarmed, gunned down in cold blood. How could this happen? How could our soldiers be left as sitting targets, even after ISIS and other jihadist armies have directly called for targeted attacks on our soldiers here in America? But this was not the first time jihadists have attacked our military here at home – the 2009 Fort Hood terrorist attack left 13 soldiers dead – and it won't be the last. Lives could have been saved. Our men and women who sacrificially serve in the military know how to responsibly use firearms in self-defense. It's what they're rigorously trained to do in defense of America. Our enemies have shown time and time again they are bent on attacking our soldiers and military communities here on U.S. soil. It's time for our federal government to use common sense and change policies and regulations so our troops can defend themselves. Right now, Department of Defense policies prioritize limiting the arming of our trained soldiers above their protection in a time of terror. These priorities must change. In 1992, the Department of Defense issued Directive limiting the ability of servicemen and women to defend themselves:

*It is DoD Policy: 1. To **limit and control the carrying of firearms** by DoD military and civilian personnel. The authorization to carry firearms shall be issued only to qualified personnel when there is a reasonable expectation that life or DoD assets will be jeopardized if firearms are not carried. Evaluation of the necessity to carry a firearm shall be made considering this expectation weighed against the possible consequences of accidental or indiscriminate use*

of firearms. DoD personnel regularly engaged in law enforcement or security duties shall be armed.

In 2011, under President Obama and after the Fort Hood terrorist attack, the Department of Defense further restricted their policy to make it even more difficult for members of our military to defend themselves here at home just as the threat continued to rise.

*It is DoD policy that: a. DoD personnel, to whom this Directive is applicable, shall be appropriately armed and have the inherent right to self-defense. b. Arming DoD personnel with firearms **shall be limited and controlled**. Qualified personnel shall be armed when required for assigned duties and there is reasonable expectation that DoD installations, property, or personnel lives or DoD assets will be jeopardized if personnel are not armed. Evaluation of the necessity to arm DoD personnel shall be made with the consideration of the possible consequences of accidental or indiscriminate use of those arms. However, the overriding factors in determining whether or not to arm are the mission and threat. Arming DoD personnel (i.e., administrative, assessment, or inspection, not regularly engaged in or directly supervising security or law enforcement activities) shall be limited to missions or threats and the immediate need to protect DoD assets or persons' lives. DoD Components have the discretion to keep designated staff personnel qualified and available or on call to perform duties.*

These priorities are completely out of line. Protection of our soldiers should be paramount. It is clear that we are in an age where Islamic terrorists are focused on murdering our defenseless soldiers here at home. Jihadists have brought the war to America. We must protect our troops and allow them to defend themselves. We're taking direct action, working with Members of Congress to protect our troops. We're preparing to

send an urgent legal letter to the Department of Defense urging critical changes in these woefully inadequate policies. We must prioritize the protection of our troops. *The Hill* has more details on what Members of Congress want to do about it:

"We can and must do more to protect our troops. Yesterday's murder of four United States Marines is a heartbreaking reminder that our men and women in uniform can be targets here at home, as they often are abroad," said Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) and Rep. Mac Thornberry (R-Texas) in a joint statement Friday. The Armed Services Committee chairmen said that long before the attack, they had been working to clarify an Army post commander's authority to allow carrying of personal firearms. They said a defense policy bill they are working on would direct the Pentagon to "end the disconnect between the threats our warfighters face and their families face and the tools they have to defend themselves."

Sen. Cruz has called for hearings and action from Congress. Rep. Duncan Hunter is preparing legislation to allow military recruiters to be armed. But the push for common-sense reform is bipartisan, with even Rep. Tulsi Gabbard, a Democrat from Hawaii who is an Army National Guard captain, calling for the Pentagon to consider reforms. *The Hill* has more:

"I recognize what the recruiters are saying, that, you know, they want to have an open and inviting and welcoming environment to be able to talk to those who are interested in serving our country in uniform," Gabbard said Thursday on CNN's "The Situation Room." But, she added, the Pentagon should "look into the possibility of having some kind of armed guard there, whether it's a military service member or some other type of guard, so that you at least have a way for our trained warriors to be able to defend themselves against these types of attacks."

Six governors – Indiana, Florida, Texas, Louisiana, Arkansas,

and Oklahoma – have issued executive orders to arm National Guardsmen. Pressure is building to do what is right – to allow the members of our military to defend themselves against all threats. One thing is clear – our enemies have brought the fight here to our nation. Those in charge of defending America must be allowed to defend themselves from jihad at home. As we prepare to send a critical letter to the Department of Defense in the coming days, we need you to add your name now. Stand with us as we demand our troops be equipped to defend themselves. **UPDATE** : We've just sent the Secretary of Defense an urgent legal letter calling for the Department of Defense (DOD) to change its priorities and protect our troops. As our letter states:

Mr. Secretary, force protection is one of your prime responsibilities. Therefore, we respectfully urge you to amend current DOD directives and other DOD documents that preclude our Service Members from being armed to protect themselves, so that men and women in uniform are never again without the means to defend themselves when attacked by a fanatical Islamic jihadist. We owe it to our soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines to allow them to defend themselves when in mortal danger.

We will continue fighting on Capitol Hill, on behalf of tens of thousands of Americans, to ensure that the protection of our troops here at home is paramount.