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NANCY WIECHEC/REUTERS

Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump in Phoenix, Arizona earlier this month.

By **Matt Rocheleau**

GLOBE STAFF JULY 17, 2015

Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump called Friday for an end to what he called “gun-free zones” on American military bases, saying the four Marines shot to death Thursday at a pair of military facilities in Tennessee “never had a chance.”

“They were highly trained, but helpless without guns,” Trump tweeted Friday morning, before later writing in all capital letters: “Military lives matter! End gun free zones! Our soldiers must be able to protect themselves! This has to stop!”

In doing so, Trump was reviving a national debate about who should be allowed to carry guns on military bases, and under what circumstances.

Can guns be carried on military bases?

Yes, but generally speaking, only military police and other personnel who are “regularly engaged in law enforcement or security duties,” as well as those who are guarding prisoners, are permitted to — and do usually — carry guns, and they can only carry government-issued weapons and ammunition.

Other “qualified personnel” may be authorized to carry guns on the base “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,” a copy of the policy posted on the Defense Department’s website said.

“Arming DoD personnel ... shall be limited to missions or threats and the immediate need to protect DoD assets or persons’ lives.”

There are certain exceptions to the restrictions, such as when military personnel are participating in training programs, or if a base is located overseas and a specific, credible threat had been identified.

Why are there restrictions?

Defense Department officials have said as recently as last year that the agency does not support arming all of its personnel on bases.

The department has said its top reasons include safety concerns and the cost and logistical issues associated with properly training personnel.

Former Army Special Forces officer and top Pentagon official Steven P. Bucci said in a telephone interview that allowing all military personnel to carry guns is a well-meaning, but naive solution.

Carrying a gun responsibly in a public setting like a military base “takes a lot of training and a lot of maturity, and I’m not sure it’s a grand idea to have everyone armed,” said Bucci, who now works at the Douglas and Sarah Allison Center for Foreign and National Security Policy at The Heritage Foundation.

He said that while civilians and other outsiders might believe that all military members are “stone-cold killer weapons experts,” that’s simply not the case.

In the Army, for example, Bucci said, personnel are taught how to use a rifle in basic training, but after that, many do not handle a rifle again. And, while some members of the Army are trained to shoot a pistol, it is not required as broadly as rifle training, he said.

Bucci also said complications would arise with military personnel traveling to and from bases surrounded by civilian communities where there are restrictions on carrying a weapon.

“Today about two-thirds of the military personnel don’t live on military installations. They live in surrounding communities, and we don’t have a national law for carrying weapons,” he said.

Still, Bucci said, perhaps changes could be made to the restrictions, including allowing personnel to carry guns on bases located in states where they are allowed to carry them.

“I think there’s a reasonable justification for reviewing this policy,” he said. “A rule change is probably warranted, but we need to do it in a way that makes sense.”

Who put the rules in place?

The latest rules governing gun carrying on military bases are spelled out in a [2011 directive](#). Those rules include just slight alterations from the preceding ones that the Department of Defense implemented [in 1992](#).

Prior to 1992, “firearms policies had been largely left to base commanders,” according to the [Military Times](#).

One common misconception about the regulations are that they were enacted under the watch of Democratic President Bill Clinton.

That idea seems to stem from [memos](#) about the gun restrictions that the US Army issued in 1993, shortly after Clinton took over as commander-in-chief. But those memos were issued only in response to, and to explain, policy changes outlined by the 1992 Defense Department directive, which was issued under the watch of George H.W. Bush.

Has anyone else called for an end to the restrictions?

Besides Trump, there have been other calls to lift the restrictions, particularly in response to [fatal shootings](#) at

military bases in recent years, including massacres in 2009 and 2014 at Fort Hood Army Base in Texas and another in 2013 at the Washington Navy Yard.

Former congressman Steve Stockman, a Republican from Texas, introduced [legislation](#) in September 2013 that would have repealed the restrictions around gun-carrying for military base personnel and would have prevented the Defense Department and the president from handing down any similar restrictions.

The bill, which attracted 21 co-sponsors, was referred to the Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, Homeland Security, and Investigations in Jan. 2014, but has not made progress since.

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