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The Military: A Move for Clear Rules for Gitmo

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John McCain learned about interrogation abuses as a POW in Vietnam. And since the Abu Ghraib Prison scandal broke, the Arizona senator has grown increasingly angry over the Pentagon's failure to state clearly what its rules of interrogation are, especially at Guantanamo Bay. McCain got tough last week with Army Gen. Brentz Craddock, the head of U.S. Southern Command (under which Gitmo falls). After questioning Craddock at a Senate hearing, McCain said U.S. policy on the treatment of prisoners was still a "morass."

Now McCain and fellow Senate Republican Lindsey Graham of South Carolina, with the help of Senate Armed Services Committee chairman John Warner, are drafting a bill that would take matters out of Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's hands and create clear rules for wartime detention, interrogation and prosecution. McCain, says spokeswoman Andrea Jones, "plans to introduce legislation that will set uniform standards for detainees." He is discussing legal language that would make a revised Army Field Manual 34-52-- the main guide for interrogations before Rumsfeld authorized new approaches--the rulebook. Such an approach would conform with anti-torture laws and treaties. Graham, a former Air Force prosecutor, wants to clarify rules for Gitmo tribunals, says spokesman Kevin Bishop. No one at Gitmo has yet been charged, and Graham "wants to see people prosecuted," says Bishop. The bill could be brought up as early as this week.

McCain and Graham, both of whom are said to have presidential ambitions, are trying to draft the bill quietly. They are wary of alienating the Bush administration--and their party--at a time of high partisan tensions in Washington, according to Capitol Hill sources who declined to be identified because of the sensitivity of the subject. At last week's Senate hearing--held to address the Pentagon's latest report on alleged prisoner abuses--other Republicans publicly defended the Pentagon. Pentagon officials, meanwhile, are trying to outflank McCain's and Graham's efforts. Army Field Manual 34-52 is already "being revised," said Defense Department spokesman Flex Plexico.

But the scandal still festers. Craddock last week repudiated the conclusion of SouthCom's report when he declined to follow the recommendation of its main author, Air Force Lt. Gen. Randall Schmidt, and admonish former Gitmo commander Geoffrey Miller. And Schmidt himself defended methods used in late 2002 against Qaeda suspect Mohammad al-Qatani (published in the latest report) that included forcing him to wear lingerie and to perform "dog tricks" on a leash. Such interrogation approaches, Schmidt said, fell under an "authorized" Field Manual technique known as "pride and ego down." The new report, says Rhode Island Sen. Jack Reed, a former Army officer, is just "another justification for, I think, terrible mistakes."