

# The DoD Times (Redacted)

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THIS WEEK'S FEATURE

## The Game of Committees

How jurisdiction becomes a shield — and service members pay the price. Five congressional committees share oversight of the DoD Inspector General system. None of them owns the outcome when it fails.

**LTC (Ret) Francesca Graham**

Vice President &amp; Chief Operating Officer, Walk the Talk Foundation

*That's not our lane.*

**There's a quiet choreography in Washington that most service members and federal civilians never see — but they feel its effects every day.**

A complaint has been filed. An investigation begins, slowly, unevenly, sometimes not at all. Weeks turn into months. Months into years. Evidence goes uncollected or untracked. Witnesses rotate out. Commanders change. And somewhere in that process, the promise of oversight — the very purpose of an Inspector General — starts to erode.

Ask why, and you'll hear a familiar refrain: *That's not our lane.*

Because in reality, the Inspector General function across the Department of Defense and the Coast Guard doesn't belong to a single authority. It exists at the intersection of multiple congressional committees — each with a legitimate claim to oversight, and none with singular accountability.

Welcome to the Game of Committees.

### THE ARCHITECTURE

At first glance, the structure makes sense. The House Armed Services Committee and Senate Armed Services Committee are responsible for authorizing the military, setting policy, structure, and funding frameworks. If you're looking at how the Department of Defense operates, they're central players.

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But oversight of federal agencies — particularly how they function internally, including Inspectors General — also falls under the House Committee on Oversight and Accountability and the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee. These committees are tasked with ensuring the government works as intended, which includes rooting out inefficiency, misconduct, and systemic failure.

Then there's the intelligence layer. When IG matters intersect with classified programs, surveillance authorities, or intelligence equities, jurisdiction shifts — sometimes abruptly — to the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence and the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence. Transparency narrows. Access constricts. Oversight becomes more opaque by design.

And for the Coast Guard, uniquely positioned within the Department of Homeland Security during peacetime, the equation becomes even more complex. The House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure and the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation assert jurisdiction over its operations, authorities, and oversight structures.

<p><b>ARMED SERVICES (HASC / SASC)</b></p> <p><b>Military authorization, policy &amp; structure. Central players — but point to Oversight when things go wrong.</b></p>	<p><b>OVERSIGHT &amp; HOMELAND SECURITY</b></p> <p><b>Federal agency accountability &amp; IG governance — but defer to Armed Services on military command structures.</b></p>
<p><b>INTELLIGENCE COMMITTEES</b></p> <p><b>Can shield classified IG matters from scrutiny entirely. Transparency narrows by design.</b></p>	<p><b>COMMERCE &amp; TRANSPORTATION</b></p> <p><b>Coast Guard oversight — argues it sits in a different statutory lane from the rest of DoD.</b></p>

Individually, each committee has a defined role. Collectively, they create a system where responsibility is diffused, coordination is inconsistent, and accountability is negotiable.

And that's where the problem begins.

## WHERE THE PROBLEM LIVES

Because when something goes wrong in an Inspector General process — when an investigation is mishandled, when a whistleblower faces reprisal, when due process is absent — the question becomes: who owns the fix?

Armed Services can point to Oversight and say it's a governance issue. Oversight can defer to Armed Services because the matter involves military command structures. Intelligence committees can shield portions of the process from scrutiny altogether. Commerce can argue that the Coast Guard sits in a different statutory lane. And behind closed doors, all of them are aware of the seams — but none are structurally compelled to close them.

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This isn't a conspiracy. It's a system operating exactly as designed — just not as intended. Because the design prioritizes jurisdictional boundaries over operational outcomes. And those boundaries create friction in the one place that cannot afford it: accountability.

*No single committee has both the authority and the obligation to say: this stops here.*

For the service member navigating an IG complaint, this fragmentation isn't theoretical. It manifests as delays with no enforceable timelines. Investigations conducted by personnel with inconsistent or insufficient training. Evidence that is poorly documented, loosely tracked, or, in some cases, functionally lost. Findings that vary dramatically — based not on facts, but on investigator experience or command climate.

There is no centralized mechanism to ensure consistency across the enterprise. No uniform credentialing standard that guarantees investigators are equipped to handle complex administrative cases. No shared data environment that allows Congress — or even the Department itself — to identify patterns of failure.

And critically, no single committee with both the authority and the obligation to say: this stops here. Instead, what exists is a system where oversight can be fragmented just enough to diffuse pressure.

## THE LEGISLATIVE PARADOX

From a legislative perspective, this creates a paradox. Congress is not unaware of these issues. Staffers across these committees regularly engage with them. Briefings occur. Data is shared. Concerns are raised. In many cases, the same problems are being discussed — sometimes by the same people — across multiple committees.

But without a unified jurisdictional approach, those conversations don't always translate into coordinated action. And so, progress stalls — not because no one cares, but because no one owns it outright.

The downstream effect is predictable. Service members and federal civilians lose trust in the system designed to protect them. Whistleblowers weigh the risk of coming forward against a process that may expose them without adequately safeguarding their rights. Veterans carry the long-term consequences of administrative actions that were never fully or fairly adjudicated.

Timeliness suffers. Transparency diminishes. Training gaps persist. And the Inspector General function — arguably one of the most critical accountability mechanisms in the federal government — becomes uneven in execution and uncertain in outcome.

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## THE PATH FORWARD

The solution is not to dismantle committee jurisdiction. Each committee brings necessary expertise and perspective. Armed Services understands military structure. Oversight understands systemic accountability. Intelligence committees manage classified equities. Commerce handles the Coast Guard's unique posture.

But what's missing is integration. A framework that aligns these committees around shared ownership of IG reform — particularly in areas that cut across all jurisdictions: investigator training and certification, evidence handling standards, case tracking systems, and enforceable timelines.

Without that alignment, reform efforts will continue to move in parallel rather than in concert. And parallel effort, in a system this complex, is indistinguishable from stagnation.

*The Game of Thrones analogy is tempting — competing houses, shifting alliances, quiet negotiations behind closed doors. But unlike fiction, there is no dramatic resolution waiting in the wings.*

There is only process. And process, left uncoordinated, defaults to inertia.

The individuals navigating these systems don't have the luxury of waiting for alignment to emerge organically. Their careers, reputations, and lives move on timelines that the current structure does not respect.

So, the question isn't whether the committees understand the problem. It's whether they're willing to step out of their lanes — just enough — to solve it together.

*Because until they do, the system will continue to function exactly as it does now: not broken enough to force change, but flawed enough to ensure that the people it was designed to protect are the ones who bear the cost.*

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LTC (Ret) Francesca Graham is the Vice President and Chief Operating Officer of the Walk the Talk Foundation. All articles are posted on LinkedIn and online at [walkthetalkfoundation.org](http://walkthetalkfoundation.org). The Star Chamber podcast is available on [Apple](#), [Spotify](#), and [YouTube](#).

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