

No to torture

by The San Diego Union-Tribune

The startling revelation by a former CIA agent that a terrorist suspect was subjected to "waterboarding" and that the exercise yielded vital information that may have disrupted a whole slew of planned attacks on U.S. soil has reopened a public debate. At issue: whether waterboarding - in which interrogators use a technique that gives a suspect the sensation of drowning - is a form of torture and whether the U.S. government, or its agents, should ever torture a prisoner in custody.

These are not easy questions, especially with the country at war on more than one front. But, the answers are "yes" and "no." Yes, waterboarding is a form of torture. That's the whole point of the practice. And no, the U.S. government shouldn't torture prisoners.

Torture is immoral and illegal. And it sets a dangerous example for other countries to follow. Besides, it's not exactly the most reliable means of extracting information. Torture someone long enough and they're likely to confess - to killing Abraham Lincoln.

That's why Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., has sponsored legislation to prohibit the use of waterboarding by U.S. intelligence agencies, just as it has already been outlawed for the military.

Passing that legislation is the right thing to do, and this is the right time for Congress to do it. Ironically, the intelligence agencies would benefit in the long run. So would U.S. intelligence officers around the world, who are always at risk when we engage in torture and let other countries know that it's OK to torture our officials when they fall into enemy hands. As our leaders are forever reminding us, this is a dangerous world. Let's not make it any more dangerous by leading a race to the bottom.

Torture is wrong and completely inconsistent with our basic principles as Americans, and there is no shame in saying so loud and clear for all the world to hear.

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