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McCain Suggests Harsh Treatment of Suspect Who Knows of Imminent Attack Wouldn't Violate Standards

Associated Press

December 18, 2005

WASHINGTON (AP) - Senator John McCain, who pushed the White House to support a ban on torture, suggested that harsh treatment of a terrorism suspect who knew of an imminent attack would not violate international standards.

The Arizona Republican said Sunday that legislation before Congress would establish in U.S. law the international standard banning any treatment of prisoners that "shocks the conscience."

That would include, McCain said, mock executions and the controversial technique known as "water boarding," in which a subject is made to think he is drowning.

Asked on ABC's "This Week" whether such treatment of a terrorism suspect who could reveal information that could stop a terrorist operation would shock the conscience, McCain said it would not.

"In that million-to-one situation, then the president of the United States would authorize it and take responsibility for it," McCain said.

"We've gone a long way from having that kind of scenario to having prisons around the world, to the renditions, to the things that have been done which are, in my view, not appropriate," he said.

McCain said he is confident Congress will set the interrogation procedures all U.S. agencies will follow.

After months of rejecting a call for antitorture legislation, President George W. Bush last week accepted McCain's proposal to ban cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment of terrorism suspects. Bush had threatened to veto any bill that contained the ban while maintaining that the U.S. did not condone torture.

"You can get into a debate about what shocks the conscience and what is cruel and inhuman, and to some extent, I suppose, that's in the eye of the beholder," Vice President Dick Cheney said Sunday in an interview to be broadcast Monday on ABC News "Nightline." "But I believe, and we think it's important to remember, that we are in a war against a group of individuals and terrorist organizations that did, in fact, slaughter 3,000 innocent Americans on 9/11, that it's important for us to be able to have effective interrogation of these people when we capture them."

Cheney said he supported the compromise Bush worked out with McCain.

Pressure for the ban had built from Republicans in Congress as well as from abroad. Abuses at Iraq's Abu Ghraib prison and the U.S. detention center at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba, as well as reports of U.S. renditions of prisoners to countries in Europe, called into question claims that torture was neither ordered nor allowed.

The legislation proposed by McCain is part of a massive defense bill before Congress.