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Humane Treatment

Editorial
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The president should not have the flexibility to order the torture or abuse of prisoners.

The United States Congress should not have to pass a law requiring humane treatment of U.S. prisoners. Sadly, a clear requirement is necessary, and the Senate was right to vote 90-9 to provide one.

In the war on terror, the United States is the good guy. Unfortunately, reports of mistreatment of suspected terrorists at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and the documented abuse of prisoners at the infamous Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq have clouded the issue and besmirched the United States' image.

Objecting to the amendment sponsored by Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., Sen. Ted Stevens, R-Alaska, said there are times when we need to treat terrorists as they treat us. He is mistaken. As McCain and others pointed out, our standards are superior to the terrorists'. We benefit by resisting the urge to become like our ruthless enemies.

The amendment could face stiff opposition in the House, where abhorrence of torture might not be as widespread and deeply rooted as it is in the Senate. But overwhelming, bipartisan passage of the amendment in the Senate places House members on the spot.

President Bush threatens to veto a \$440 billion military spending bill if the amendment is attached to its final version. Bush has cried wolf, but has never cast a veto. Vetoing this bill could produce a crisis and endanger the U.S. war effort in Iraq.

White House officials objected to the amendment because it would limit the authority and flexibility of the president. True, but no president should have the authority or flexibility to order the torture or abuse of prisoners. It doesn't produce usable intelligence, it endangers the safety of captured U.S. troops and it's wrong on its face.

The similarity of the alleged mistreatment at Guantanamo Bay to the documented prisoner abuse at Abu Ghraib and other prisons in Iraq and Afghanistan suggests a pattern of official encouragement or indifference. Either way, the House should follow the Senate's lead, and President Bush should welcome a measure banning inhumane treatment of prisoners at the hands of the U.S. military.