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Army Won't Use 'Water-Boarding'

Interrogation method will be banned

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GENEVA - The U.S. Army will prohibit "water-boarding" when it issues its new interrogation manual, the State Department's legal adviser told the U.N. Committee Against Torture on Monday.

John B. Bellinger III said banning the practice of submerging a prisoner's head in water in an effort to make him talk wasn't an admission that American interrogators had used the technique on detainees during the war on terrorism.

But the Army's decision to outlaw the technique raised concerns about how widely it has been used and why the Army felt it needed to mention it in the manual. Previous versions of the manual hadn't listed it, either as an approved technique or a banned one.

"That they've specifically dealt with it - even while saying that doesn't mean it was happening previously - raises questions," said Jamil Dakwar, a field attorney for the American Civil Liberties Union. Dakwar has been monitoring the U.N. committee's hearing into U.S. adherence to the U.N.'s Convention on Torture.

Water-boarding was among several harsh interrogation techniques reportedly sanctioned by a Justice Department memo written in August 2002. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld in December 2002 approved the use of techniques that induced the sensation of drowning among 17 practices at the prison at the American naval base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

Rumsfeld rescinded his approval of those techniques six weeks later after Defense Department attorneys objected, and U.S. officials have said that detainees have been treated humanely.

Reports that CIA interrogators were using the technique have persisted.

The water-boarding ban would extend to the CIA and other U.S. agencies that may be holding terrorism suspects. Last fall, over the objections of the White House, Congress passed legislation that requires all American agencies to use only interrogation techniques that are in the Army's field manual.

U.N. committee members had asked about water-boarding Friday during the opening session of the hearing into U.S. practices. Bellinger responded Monday.

The committee is reviewing whether the United States is following the U.N. Convention on Torture.