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## **'Torture Doesn't Work'**

The White House should support Sen. John McCain's efforts to clarify the ban on cruel and degrading treatment of prisoners.

Editorial  
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Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., knows about prisoner abuse. As a naval aviator, he was shot down over Vietnam and spent 5 1/2 years as a prisoner of war in the infamous Hanoi Hilton, where he was beaten and tortured. Now McCain is leading an effort to clarify the rules of humane interrogation and prisoner treatment for the U.S. military. The Bush administration should be embracing it instead of trying to kill it.

Clarifying the ban on cruel and degrading treatment would reassert the nation's commitment to the rules of civilized warfare. It would protect both prisoners and members of the military, and after the abuses at Abu Ghraib it would reassure allies that America has not compromised its values in the war on terror.

McCain has influential Republican colleagues on his side, including Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman John Warner, R-Virginia, and Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C. But Vice President Dick Cheney is lobbying against the effort, arguing the reforms would tie the president's hands.

That undercuts the administration's assurances that the abuses suffered by detainees at Guantanamo Bay, Abu Ghraib and other detention centers were unauthorized aberrations and the result of "a few bad apples." Prisoner mistreatment has been approved by top military and administration officials, including Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld. Cheney's efforts to block the institution of clear rules on humane treatment are just another indication of the administration's hypocrisy.

McCain's legislation would apply only to the Defense Department. It would not interfere with CIA's disturbing practice of rendition - turning suspects over to foreign governments that routinely use torture. It would require all Defense Department personnel to treat prisoners in accordance with an Army field manual. It also would bar cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment of detainees in accordance with American law and international treaties.

The opposition is considerable. When Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist couldn't ensure that the \$491-billion Pentagon authorization bill for the 2006 fiscal year would be considered without McCain's amendments, he pulled the legislation from further consideration. Even if McCain succeeds, the White House is threatening to veto the bill.

To those who say we should be cruel because our enemies are, McCain has a ready response: "Our values are different from those of our enemies. . . . We do not abuse human rights." To those who say we should use any technique to obtain intelligence, McCain says: "Torture doesn't work." And he should know.