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McCain Will Not Bend On Detainee Treatment

He Pushes White House to Ban Torture

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Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) said yesterday he would not compromise with the White House on the words in his amendment that would put into law the banning of cruel, inhumane and degrading treatment of detainees.

Asked on NBC's "Meet the Press," in light of his current discussions with national security adviser Stephen J. Hadley, whether he would accept any compromise, McCain, answered, "No . . . I won't. We won't." McCain was tortured while a prisoner of the North Vietnamese.

McCain, whose language was approved by the Senate in a 90 to 9 vote, said the talks with Hadley were "on aspects of this" and would not speculate on whether they would be successful. Appearing on ABC's "This Week," Hadley said, "We have competing objectives here," indicating that perhaps at issue was whether the McCain language could be viewed as Congress interfering with the executive powers of the president to carry out his duties to protect the nation.

"We're trying to find a way, as we say, where we can strike the balance between being aggressive to protect the country against the terrorists, and at the same time comply with the law," Hadley said.

McCain, as in the past, noted that the United States' use of torturelike techniques could lead to them being used against captured Americans, has damaged U.S. prestige abroad and produced unreliable intelligence. He pointed out that some intelligence "used in one of the president's speeches . . . concerning the threat of weapons of mass destruction . . . was later recanted."

Although McCain did not say so, it was an apparent reference to prewar information on Saddam Hussein training al Qaeda terrorists in the use of chemical and biological weapons. The information was given by a detainee questioned at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, who later recanted.

Hadley also said on "Fox News Sunday" that Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice will be discussing "in a comprehensive way" foreign government concerns about CIA covert prisons during her trip to Europe this week. He said she will emphasize that all nations threatened by terrorism must cooperate and that "we do not move people around the world so that they can be tortured."

Rep. John P. Murtha (D-Pa.), also on ABC's "This Week," said a distinction had to be drawn between fighting terrorism and the insurgency when it comes to Iraq. "Terrorism is in Afghanistan," Murtha said, "and the insurgency is in Iraq. The insurgents are all internal. Just 3 to 7 percent are al Qaeda."

Noting that polls show 80 percent of Iraqis want U.S. forces out of Iraq and 45 percent say it is justified to kill U.S. soldiers, Murtha said, "There's more chance of democracy, less chance of terrorism [and] the insurgency will be reduced if we get out of there."

Hadley, on the same program, said, "If we pull out now, it will mean handing over Iraq to the Zarqawi [terrorist] faction." Murtha, appearing later, answered that only 7 percent of those opposing the U.S.-led coalition forces are followers of Abu Musab Zarqawi. The main insurgents, he said, are Iraqis who are involved in an internal civil war between Shiite and Sunni factions. "Our troops are the targets of the civil war. They're the only people that could have unified the various factions in Iraq, and they're unified against us. And every day we're there means more casualties."