



# History of an Interrogation Technique: Water Boarding

## New Debate Sparked on What Constitutes Torture

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CIA Director Porter Goss maintained this week that the CIA does not employ methods of torture. In doing so, he opened a new debate over exactly what constitutes torture -- especially when it comes to the harshest of the CIA's six secret interrogation techniques, known as "water boarding."

The water board technique dates back to the 1500s during the Italian Inquisition. A prisoner, who is bound and gagged, has water poured over him to make him think he is about to drown.

Current and former CIA officers tell ABC News that they were trained to handcuff the prisoner and cover his face with cellophane to enhance the distress. According to Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., himself a torture victim during the Vietnam War, the water board technique is a "very exquisite torture" that should be outlawed.

"Torture is defined under the federal criminal code as the intentional infliction of severe mental pain or suffering," said John Sifton, an attorney and researcher with the organization Human Rights Watch. "That would include water boarding."

On "Good Morning America" today, Goss told ABC News' Charles Gibson that the CIA does not inflict pain on prisoners.

Yet, in response to Gibson's inquiry if water boarding would come under the heading of torture, Goss simply replied, "I don't know."

Water boarding was designated as illegal by U.S. generals in Vietnam 40 years ago. A photograph that appeared in The Washington Post of a U.S. soldier involved in water boarding a North Vietnamese prisoner in 1968 led to that soldier's severe punishment.

"The soldier who participated in water torture in January 1968 was court-martialed within one month after the photos appeared in The Washington Post, and he was drummed out of the Army," recounted Darius Rejali, a political science professor at Reed College.

Earlier in 1901, the United States had taken a similar stand against water boarding during the Spanish-American War when an Army major was sentenced to 10 years of hard labor for water boarding an insurgent in the Philippines.

"Even when you're fighting against belligerents who don't respect the laws of war, we are obliged to hold the laws of war," said Rejali. "And water torture is torture."

This morning, Goss insisted that the CIA and its officers are not breaking U.S. law.

"We do debriefings because debriefings are the nature of our business -- to get information, and we do all that, and we do it in a way that does not involve torture because torture is counterproductive," Goss said.

The CIA maintains its interrogation techniques are in legal guidance with the Justice Department. And current and former CIA officers tell ABC News there is a presidential finding, signed in 2002, by President Bush, Condoleezza Rice and then-Attorney General John Ashcroft approving the techniques, including water boarding.

*ABC News' Maddy Sauer, Vic Walter, and Rich Esposito contributed to this report.*

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