

Waterboarding: The CIA comes clean

George W. Bush's place in history is assured, and *The Washington Post* in an editorial. He will be forever remembered as the only president to "authorize torture." In testimony before Congress last week, CIA Director Michael Hayden finally admitted what everyone already knew: that despite Bush's repeated insistence that "we do not torture," terrorist suspects in U.S. custody were subjected to "waterboarding," a brutal technique that simulates drowning and "causes its victims to feel that they are about to die." Waterboarding has been considered torture, and banned, by previous administrations, as well as by every civilized nation in the world—a group to which the U.S. has long proudly claimed membership. By authorizing the torture of U.S. detainees, Bush has put a permanent blot on the reputation of this country that won't easily be removed.

Are you listening to the same testimony? said *Chicago Tribune*. Before last week, hysterical critics of this administration had implied that waterboarding was a "regular tool in the arsenal of American intelligence interrogators." But, as Hayden explained, the president authorized the waterboarding of only *three* detainees—Khalid bin Mohammed, the "driving force" behind the Sept. 11 attacks, and two other high-ranking al Qaeda operatives with direct knowledge of

future plots. No one has been waterboarded in the five years since. That's "one waterboarding of a complicit terrorist for every thousand innocent people killed on 9/11," said **Andrew McCarthy** in *National Review Online*. Is that really worth all the public hand-wringing by the Left, which portrays Bush—and those who agreed with his interrogation policies—as sadistic "torture-mongers?" We're not. We simply believe in self-defense, with practices such as waterboarding to be reserved for "the most extreme of national emergencies."

If the use of torture was morally justified five years ago, said **Dahlia Lithwick** in *Slate.com*, then why deny it until only last week? The answer is obvious: Waterboarding was illegal under U.S. and international law when Bush secretly authorized it, which is why he insisted Congress change the law after the fact. The administration's real agenda in ignoring the law, said **Tim Rutten** in the *Los Angeles Times*, was not to legitimize torture. It wasn't even to protect national security. Vice President Dick Cheney and his fellow authoritarians came into office with the goal of expanding presidential power, and freeing the executive from the meddlesome interference of Congress and the courts. Thanks to that largely successful mission, we are now not only a nation that tortures people. We're a nation with an "imperial presidency."