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Bush vetoes bill outlawing CIA waterboarding

REUTERS
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WASHINGTON (Reuters) - President George W. Bush on Saturday vetoed legislation passed by Congress that would have banned the CIA from using waterboarding and other controversial interrogation techniques.

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Lawmakers included the anti-torture measure in a broader bill authorizing U.S. intelligence activities.

"Because the danger remains, we need to ensure our intelligence officials have all the tools they need to stop the terrorists," Bush said in his weekly radio address. He added that the vetoed legislation "would diminish these vital tools."

House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi of California said Democrats would try to overturn Bush's veto and said U.S. moral authority was at stake.

"We will begin to reassert that moral authority by attempting to override the president's veto next week," Pelosi said.

Democratic Sen. Edward Kennedy of Massachusetts called Bush's veto "one of the most shameful acts of his presidency."

It is unlikely that Democrats, the majority party in Congress, could muster enough votes to overturn Bush's veto. The bill passed the House and Senate on partisan votes, short of the support needed to reverse the president.

The House approved the legislation in December and the Senate passed it in February despite White House warnings it would be vetoed.

CIA Director Michael Hayden told Congress last month that government interrogators used waterboarding on three suspects captured after the September 11 attacks.

The simulated drowning technique has been condemned by many members of Congress, human rights groups and other countries as a form of illegal torture.

The U.S. Army Field Manual prohibits waterboarding and seven other interrogation methods and the bill would have aligned CIA practices with the military's.

In a message to CIA employees on Saturday after Bush's veto, Hayden said the CIA would continue to work strictly within the law but said its needs were different from that of the U.S. Army and that the CIA needed to follow its own procedures.

"There are methods in CIA's program that have been briefed to our oversight committees, are fully consistent with the Geneva Convention and current U.S. law, and are most certainly not torture," Hayden said.

In his remarks, Bush did not specifically mention waterboarding.

But he said: "The bill Congress sent me would not simply ban one particular interrogation method, as some have implied. Instead, it would eliminate all the alternative procedures we've developed to question the world's most dangerous and violent terrorists."

(Reporting by Richard Cowan; Editing by Eric Beech)

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