

Top SBC ethicist calls waterboarding torture: Land: Torture "violates everything we stand for"

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Southern Baptist ethicist Richard Land, a leading Christian conservative who helped advance the Bush administration's agenda on a range of social issues, says that the formerly sanctioned practice of waterboarding of suspected terrorists is torture and "violates everything we stand for."

Land, who is president of the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, repudiated the simulated drowning technique in an interview May 5 with Religion News Service.

According to recently released memos, federal agents under Bush waterboarded two suspected terrorists 266 times in attempts to extract information.

"I consider waterboarding torture," Land said. "One of the definitions of torture is that it causes permanent physical harm. I can't separate physical from psychological. And I can't imagine that being repeatedly subjected to the feeling of drowning would not, in some cases, cause lasting psychological trauma."

But Land also criticized President Obama for publicly releasing Bush-era documents that authorized particular interrogation techniques.

"To leave open the possibility of prosecuting men for what the Justice Department had declared was legal, I think is a horrific mistake," Land said. "If it were to lead to trials of some sort, it would rip the country apart."