

By Gina Kim From [The Modesto Bee](#) | Original Article

John Yoo didn't set out to become the face of torture.

But that's what happened after the former attorney in the George W. Bush administration wrote memos justifying the expansion of presidential powers – including how the government treats suspected terrorists – following the 9/11 attacks.

And it's a label that continues to stick to the 43-year-old Yoo, who has since returned to teaching constitutional and international law at the University of California, Berkeley.

About 10 protesters sporting orange ribbons in a nod to the jumpsuit color of Guantánamo Bay detainees crowded the sidewalk in front of Capitol Plaza Ballrooms on Ninth Street on Wednesday, forcing Yoo to enter through a side door to address a monthly luncheon of the Sacramento Press Club.

"It's just like I'm still in Berkeley," Yoo joked as he began his prepared remarks to about 65 journalists, communications officers and guests at the event, where he publicized his new book, "Crisis and Command: A History of Executive Power from George Washington to George W. Bush."

Yoo, who was a U.S. deputy assistant attorney general, remains unapologetic about his interpretation of executive authority during times of war and stands by his memos ultimately leading to waterboarding and other interrogation techniques widely believed to be torture.

"It's a wartime policy question," Yoo said. "American presidents, when they know the threats the country is under, it's no surprise they made the choices they did."

Yoo believes the American government should not have to abide by Geneva Conventions torture guidelines when the enemy is not.

And although Yoo said he was not privy to what CIA directors discovered during their interrogations of suspected terrorists, he thinks further U.S. attacks were averted as a result.

"We're fighting a covert enemy that tries to disguise themselves as civilians and who are killing civilians," he said.

"Shouldn't we be tougher on them than we would be on honorable soldiers?"

Protesters, who have made it their cause to have Yoo prosecuted, disbarred or at least fired from Berkeley, vehemently disagree.

With enlarged photos of bound prisoners being beaten or attacked by dogs, the protesters passed out literature and strapped signs to their backs stating, "John Yoo is a war criminal," and "Torture is a crime."

"I have eight grandchildren, and the country I want my grandchildren to inherit is one that respects people," said 66-year-old Mary Ann Thomas, a member of the World Can't Wait, which puts out a blog, [www.firejohnnyoo.org](http://www.firejohnnyoo.org).

Thomas lives in Oakland and is an information technology specialist for a federal agency. She takes at least a couple days off work each month to picket Bay Area events where Yoo is appearing, because she sees societal acceptance of torture as a step toward fascism.

Noel Juan, 53, a nightclub DJ from San Francisco, sees the time he spends sending e-mails and marching in front of venues as an issue of morality.

"International law states you cannot torture people," Juan said. "If people have a shred of conscience, these crimes have to be opposed and dragged out into the light of day."

Jeanie Keltner, 72, of Sacramento felt compelled to spend time demonstrating when she would normally be drinking coffee in her retirement. She waved a hand-lettered sign labeling Yoo a "sadist."

"I want to shame him," said the former literature professor at California State University, Sacramento. "It's truly heartbreaking what's happening to our country."

But Yoo never crossed paths with the protesters or even heard the chants of "fire John Yoo." Yoo said he supports their right to express their views although he dislikes the sideways image of him they use with his glasses perched on his nose.

"I just wish they would use a better photo," he said.