

Critique of the Presidential Task Force on
Psychological Ethics and National Security (PENS)
June 2005

In 2005, APA President Ronald Levant convened a Presidential Task Force on Psychological Ethics and National Security (PENS) to assess the ethical challenges facing the role of psychologists in national security-related activities. This was in response to concerns from APA members and divisions regarding reputable reports of the participation of psychologists in the interrogation of terror suspects where torture was suspected. Per one PENS task force member, the task force was also convened in an effort to assist the Department of Defense (DoD) to establish an interrogation policy after it was announced that the American Psychiatric Association would be issuing a statement prohibiting its member from participating in interrogations.

- The task force was hand picked by Stephen Behnke, Director, APA Ethics Office and Ron Levant, APA President. Gerald Koocher, APA President-Elect at the time was added as a second APA liaison, although there is typically one APA liaison from the APA Board of Directors. Dr. Koocher was accused by at least two non-DoD task force members of exerting undue influence over the proceedings, particularly in the listserv communications before and after the meeting, in contradiction to the role of an APA liaison.
- Task force meetings typically have few observers, only expert consultants invited briefly. The agenda and goals of the PENS meeting were determined by non-voting APA officials attending the meetings. The people who sat in included: Russ Newman, Director of the APA Practice Directorate; APA Rhea Farberman, Office of Public Affairs publicist; Steven Breckler, Director of the APA Science Directorate; Heather Kelley, of the APA Science Directorate; Melvin Gravitz, a former director of the Navy Internship Program; and Susan Brandon, former APA official and organizer of APA-CIA & FBI conferences. At the time, Brandon worked in the White House Office of Science & Technology Policy. Heather Kelley and others also served as APA lobbyists for DoD and CIA funds, and had previously lobbied even one of the task force members.
- The APA Director of Ethics, a non-voting participant, wrote all the report drafts, producing the first at midday on the first meeting day. The final draft of the PENS report was concluded 24 hours after the conclusion of the 2-1/2 day meeting.
- The DoD, including the intelligence community, employed or had contracted with six of the 10 PENS task force members. Some held senior commands and participated in interrogations at Guantanamo, Abu Ghraib, or Afghanistan. Three members were non-DoD APA members and the 10th member (non-voting) was the Chair of the PENS Task Force, Olivia Moorehead-Slaughter and simultaneously 2005 Vice-chair of the APA Ethics Committee.
- Task force membership was not released to the public (only to the APA Council of Representatives) and the report was not signed (extraordinary in APA). It was not until a year latter that an investigative reporter published the names of task force members. One non-DoD member voted against the resolution regarding confidentiality and another abstained. Of the three non-DoD affiliated voting members, one resigned, a second denounced and exposed the task force and a third had serious reservations.

- At least one of the DOD-affiliated members was not an APA member (extraordinary in APA).
- One DoD psychologist censured a non-DoD member for taking notes on the first day, forcing that member to take notes covertly. Only the Director of the APA Ethics Office was allowed to take notes.
- Task force members were prohibited to speak about the report. Only two non-members of the task force were authorized to field inquiries: the Director, APA Ethics Office and the APA publicist.
- The Council of Representatives did not ratify the report. Instead, the APA Board of Directors authorized it on an emergency basis.
- Allying with U.S. policy, non-task force attendees argued during the proceedings that U.S law rather than international law regarding torture must apply because of the job commitments of DoD psychologists. Two non-DOD members objected, and the third expressed concern.
- The report concluded psychologists' involvement in detainee interrogations was ethical.

This summary was prepared from material in the public domain and first hand accounts of participants.

Jim Andrikopoulos, Ph.D. ABPP
February 11, 2008