

**PLEASE NOMINATE
STEVEN REISNER FOR APA PRESIDENT**

DR. REISNER'S STATEMENT:

I am seeking nomination for President of the American Psychological Association because I believe that the APA must take a principled stance against our nation's policy of using psychologists to oversee abusive and coercive interrogations of detainees and 'enemy combatants at centers like Guantánamo and secret CIA black sites, that operate in violation of international law and the Geneva conventions.

Reports from military investigations, as well as from the press, have revealed that our nation has undertaken a program of systematic abuse and torture of detainees and 'enemy combatants' captured in the 'war on terror.' More ominously for our profession, psychologists have been instrumental in the planning, research, execution and supervision of the processes of that abuse.

Since 2005, the APA leadership has supported psychologists' roles in the machinery of abusive CIA and military interrogations. Most recently, after significant pressure from the membership, the APA Board proposed a resolution that purported to restrict such activity, but the carefully crafted language of that resolution undermines its effectiveness. The most commonly used abusive techniques are prohibited only if they can be shown to cause "significant" or "lasting" harm. Thus, the APA's "Resolution Against Torture" actually maintains our profession's departure from our first ethical principle, which is to "do no harm." I ask for your vote because the APA's policy on detainee interrogations continues to have serious and detrimental consequences – not only for detainees held outside of international law, but for our colleagues, our profession, and our nation.

I come from a family that endured the Holocaust. My family has firsthand experience with a government that labeled masses of people threats to 'national security' and decided that those 'enemies' were not entitled to human or civil rights. In my family's history, like so many other persecuted families in the Holocaust, in South Africa, in Latin America, and elsewhere, health professionals played a crucial role in the atrocities.

When leaders of other health professions reject all participation in detainee abuse, and our leaders justify participation, I am ashamed of our profession. I wish we had a spokesperson as honorable as ApA President Sharfstein, after his visit to Guantánamo:

This is a paramount challenge to our ethics and our Hippocratic training. Judging from the record of the actual treatment of detainees, it is the thinnest of thin lines that separates such consultation from involvement in facilitating deception and cruel and degrading treatment. Innocent people being released from People-people who never were our enemies and had no useful information in the War on Terror-are returning to their homes and families bearing terrible internal scars. Our profession is lost if we play any role in inflicting these wounds.

In contrast, here are the remarks of our President, Ron Levant after the same visit:

I accepted this offer to visit Guantánamo because I saw the invitation as an important opportunity to continue to provide our expertise and guidance for how psychologists can play an appropriate and ethical role in national security investigations. Our goals are to ensure that psychologists add value and safeguards to such investigations and that they are done in an ethical and effective manner that protects the safety of all involved.

Dr. Sharfstein's first concern was to protect the humanity of both the psychiatrists and the detainees. Dr. Levant, in contrast, was more concerned with protecting psychologists' positions of influence in the military and intelligence services. Psychiatrists, physicians, and nurses have addressed the realities of abuse, while psychologists have denied them. Here for example is how APA President Gerald Koocher (who followed Levant) addressed the issue:

A number of opportunistic commentators masquerading as scholars have continued to report on alleged abuses by mental health professionals.

My candidacy calls for a clear departure from the complicity of psychologists in state-sponsored abuses of human rights, whether these take place at Guantánamo, CIA black sites, or domestic supermax prisons.

I have been told that psychologists might fear for their jobs if we hold to a principled stance on detainees' basic human rights. I fear for our nation and our profession if we don't. And I hope that there are enough psychologists who feel similarly to me, so that the APA might at last join the other health professions in unambiguously opposing the practices that have brought shame to our profession and our nation.

When systematic violations of international law and human rights, sanctioned by government, take place in secret, and when arrests, detentions, and abusive interrogations are deemed appropriate without evidence or the rule of law, we cannot expect individual military or intelligence psychologists to stop those abuses. Instead, the APA must articulate standards that ensure that no health professionals in our country are put in such vulnerable positions. Health associations must band together to prohibit their members from taking part, and to remind our government of our basic ethical responsibilities.

The refusal of other health professional organizations to participate in such interrogations on ethical grounds has successfully interfered with the government's ability to assert that these interrogations are safe, legal, and ethical. Unfortunately, psychologists, with the APA's approval, have rushed in to fill that gap, and the military has responded by making psychologists the senior supervisors of those interrogations and of those detention conditions.

The APA chose psychologists from the very commands responsible for military and CIA interrogations to write APA's policy on interrogations and to convince the Council to maintain these policies when it debated the ensuing resolutions on interrogations.

The APA selected psychologists who had been responsible for supervising military and CIA interrogation programs at Guantánamo, Bagram, Abu Ghraib, and at CIA black sites to write the APA's ethical policy on interrogation.¹ It should surprise no one that those resolutions and reports employed language that echoed current military, intelligence, and Bush administration policy. Thus, for example, the APA's 2007 Council Resolution condemns the most widely used CIA torture techniques – isolation, sleep deprivation, sensory-deprivation, and sensory bombardment – only if they can be shown to cause "significant" or "lasting" harm. The Bush Administration, too, in the infamous 'torture memo,' written by John Bybee, defined torture in similar language: to be prohibited the act must "result in significant psychological harm of significant duration".² The Bush Administration continues to claim that the techniques of psychological abuse, such as sleep deprivation, isolation, sensory deprivation and sensory bombardment, do not reach that standard, and thus are not prohibited.

Psychologists' ethics require the APA to be on the other side of this issue. The APA has an obligation to protest the manipulation of psychological knowledge and research for abusive interrogations and as part of the rationalization of abusive confinement conditions.

Thus far, the APA has not condemned the abuse of psychological knowledge by our military and intelligence agencies, even when military health professional claim "pre-existing conditions" to deny veterans mental health benefits³ or to claim that Guantánamo suicide attempts are not the result of torture or indefinite isolation.⁴

How will history judge us? Will future scholars of atrocity write a book about the complicity of American psychologists in torture? Or will they be able to say that a group of psychologists prevailed in holding our profession to a higher standard? Will the story end with the fact that the APA's ethical policy on detainees was written by psychologists from the Joint Intelligence Group at Guantánamo and the CIA's Counter Terrorism Center? Or will historians of psychology be able to say that the membership rejected the policy written by psychologists from those commands, and put in its place a policy that prioritized our first ethical principle:

Psychologists strive to benefit those with whom they work and take care to do no harm. In their professional actions, psychologists seek to safeguard the welfare and rights of those with whom they interact professionally and other affected persons...

I encourage you to join me in rectifying APA policy on national security detentions and interrogations. We can then welcome back to the APA the many members who have resigned or withheld dues and the academic departments opposed to APA policy.

I ask for your support in nominating me first on the ballot for APA President.

Sincerely,
Steven Reisner, Ph.D.
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DR. REISNER'S BIO:

Steven Reisner, Ph.D., is Senior Faculty and Supervisor at the International Trauma Studies Program (an affiliate of the Mailman School of Public Health at Columbia University). He is Adjunct Professor of Psychology and Education at Columbia University, Teachers College, and on the faculties of the Department of Psychiatry and the Psychoanalytic Institute at the New York University Medical School. Dr. Reisner has worked in diverse roles as a consultant in the effects of war, exile, and torture, including training psychiatrists in Iraq to treat survivors of Saddam Hussein's torture regime, and training returning refugees in Kosovo to use theater and testimony to address the trauma of exile. Currently he is a consultant to the clinical staff at the United Nations for stress and trauma of UN staff in over 150 countries.

FOR A DETAILED HISTORY OF THE ISSUE OF PSYCHOLOGISTS,
INTERROGATIONS, AND THE APA, PLEASE SEE:

“Analysis of the Frequently Asked Questions Regarding APA's Policies and Positions on the Use of Torture or Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment During Interrogations” by the Coalition for an Ethical Psychology. The document can be found at:
<http://tinyurl.com/ys3fjy>

¹ Report of the American Psychological Association Presidential Task Force on Psychological Ethics and National Security [<http://www.apa.org/releases/PENSTaskForceReportFinal.pdf>]

²Memorandum for Alberto R. Gonzales, Counsel to the President
[<http://slate.com/features/whatistorture/pdfs/020801.pdf>]

³ <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/07/23/AR2007072300686.html?tid=informbox>

⁴ <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9900E7D61238F934A25755CoA9659C8B63>