

Veterans For Peace Keeps Eye on Military Psychologists and American Psychological Association

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As former members of the armed forces, we at Veterans For Peace have a lived understanding of the longstanding use of psychology in warfare by the United States. **We are products of it.** As such, we are well acquainted with the American Psychological Association's historically profitable relationship with what is now known as the Department of Defense. We are also acutely aware of the military psychological industry's deleterious impacts on our lives and the lives of Peoples around the world.



The APA's enmeshment with the national security apparatus of the United States became public knowledge when the world learned that psychologists were contributing to torture. In addition, an independent review, commissioned by the APA Board of Directors, revealed direct coordination between APA staff and Department of Defense personnel in interpreting the APA's Ethics Code to allow members to continue to participate in interrogations of detainees captured in the "war on terror."

Not only is torture morally wrong, it is illegal under treaties that the United States has signed, ratified, and then reinterpreted in domestic law to allow the implementation of the torture program. These include the Geneva Conventions (which prescribe how people affected by war, whether as soldiers or civilians, may be treated) and the United Nations Convention against Torture.

Holding prisoners indefinitely at detention centers without genuine legal recourse is also illegal under international law. Yet that is precisely what is happening today at sites like the U.S. base occupying Guantánamo Bay.

Three years ago, the APA's Council of Representatives voted 157-1 in Resolution 23B to forbid its members to participate in national security interrogations or to provide treatment to detainees at detention or interrogation centers such as the base in Guantánamo Bay unless they are working directly for detainees themselves, or by an independent third party like the International Committee of the Red Cross. At that time APA president-elect Susan H. McDaniel, PhD, said in an APA press release, "We have much work ahead as we change the culture of APA to be more transparent and much more focused on human rights."

Now **factions within the APA are getting ready to undo all that good work.** The Council of Representatives will vote on two resolutions at the upcoming APA convention in August:

- One, Resolution 35B, would amend 23B to once again allow APA military psychologists to return to detention or interrogation centers to treat detainees, even if they would be employed directly by the military.
- The other, Resolution 13D, would undo the APA's efforts "to be more transparent" by removing the findings of the independent review (the Hoffman Report) from the APA website. This action constitutes an act of censorship and would bury important truths about a painful episode in APA's history.

These resolutions hardly help the APA to be "much more focused on human rights." Rather, it will allow the organization to focus on the ambitions of some psychologists at the expense of human rights.

Veterans For Peace strongly encourages the American Psychological Association's Council of Representatives to stay true to its commitment to culture change, transparency, and a much-needed focus on human rights. We hope that our opposition to these proposed resolutions gives military psychologists pause. Many of us have been in the position of losing our humanity in "service" to the interests of the U.S. government. We understand how military culture, coupled with the horrors of making war, can overpower benign intentions and diminish empathy for others, bringing people to follow unlawful orders and ultimately to commit various atrocities -- all in the belief that they are doing the right thing. We wonder what will happen when the ethical and/or moral integrity of a military psychologist is challenged by the various **toxicities in military culture**? Such a policy not only puts the people in care at risk of psychological injury, it puts **military psychologists at risk of committing morally injurious acts.**

We call on military psychologists to **disobey unlawful orders** at all times and to focus their efforts on healing the wounds of war rather than causing them. They cannot do this if they are working for the U.S. military or intelligence services in settings such as the base occupying Guantánamo Bay, or other extra-territorial sites that are illegal under international law.

We join with others who call on the APA's Council of Representatives to maintain the courageous stance it took in 2015 and reject resolutions 35B and 13D.

[Center for Victims of Torture Letter to APA](#)

[APA: Do Not Take a "See No Evil" Approach to Torture](#)

[Veterans: Do Not Send Military Psychologists Back to Gitmo](#)

[APA to Vote on Overturning Ban on Psychologists at Guantanamo](#)

[Psychologists Are In A Nasty Fight About A Report on Torture](#)

[Another Crossroads for the APA](#)

A Human Rights and Ethics Crisis Facing the World's Largest Organization of Psychologists