

## **A SHORT HISTORY OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION AND THE U.S. MILITARY**

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The U.S. response to September 11<sup>th</sup> marked a fundamental shift in the country's approach to combating terrorism – from a law enforcement approach to a war paradigm. The implications of this shift for the military have received significant attention, but the impact on other professions, in particular psychology, is far-reaching but less publicized. The Bush Administration emphasized intelligence gathering as key to defeating Al Qaeda and looked to psychologists to assist in inducing suspected fighters to cooperate with interrogators and share what they knew. Subsequent revelations of the involvement of psychologists in the development and implementation of so-called “enhanced interrogation techniques” used by interrogators has focused the spotlight on the professional ethics of psychologists and the ramifications of their breach.

The participation of psychologists in interrogations of suspected terrorists may be explained, in part, by the history of close ties between the field of psychology and the U.S. military. The largest national professional association of psychologists, the American Psychological Association (APA) owes its institutional success, in part, to its long-standing, cooperative relationship with the military, which this paper reviews.

### **EARLY CONNECTION: WORLD WAR I AND WORLD WAR II**

At the end of the 19th century, psychology began to depart from its philosophical roots and develop as a field of science. Its practitioners sought increased societal recognition and respect. Early leaders leveraged the opportunity provided by World War I to make the field relevant to the U.S. war effort and elevate the status of the profession. Members supported the efforts of

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APA president Robert Yerkes to mobilize psychologists for national service. Approximately 400 psychologists served in the war in a variety of areas. For example, these professionals administered psychological exams of recruits, assisted in selecting soldiers for specific military duties, and analyzed psychological problems and aptitudes of pilots.

These early efforts paid off. According to an official history of the APA, the contribution of psychologists to the U.S. military conferred prestige on the profession and accelerated the entry of psychologists into the “world of practical applications and professional practitioners.”<sup>2</sup> In 1919, the APA elected as president Walter Dill Scott, the psychologist with the highest army rank. The selection of Dill, a military insider, signaled the profession’s positive regard for the armed forces and laid the groundwork for future cooperation between the field and the military.

As World War II approached, the APA again recruited psychologists for national service. At least one scholar noted that the organization saw in its members’ military service the opportunity to build respect for the field of psychology.<sup>3</sup> Psychologists again served the military in a variety of capacities. They conducted psychological testing and screening of new recruits. They also began clinical treatment of thousands of American soldiers who returned home from the war with what was described as “shell shock,” a psychological casualty of combat. In addition, the military employed psychologists to study and propose “psychological operations” designed to destroy the morale of German soldiers. One psychologist drafted memos analyzing the “Nazi mentality” in an effort to improve interrogation techniques used on German prisoners of war.<sup>4</sup> Still other efforts were directed towards studying prisoner of war populations in order to determine improved ways of controlling the incarcerated enemy. Psychological research was designed and conducted with the express purpose of advancing U.S. war aims.

## **POST-WAR APA**

The APA emerged from World War II a larger, more complex, and powerful institution. As captured in a self-sponsored history of the organization:

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<sup>2</sup> Rand B. Evans, Virginia Staudt Sexton and Thomas C. Cadwallader, *100 Years: The American Psychological Association/A Historical Perspective*, ed. Rand B. Evans, Virginia Staudt Sexton and Thomas C. Cadwallader (Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 1992), 113.

<sup>3</sup> Ellen Herman, *The Romance of American Psychology: Political Culture in the Age of Experts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 19.

<sup>4</sup> Herman, 49.

The psychology community's wartime alliance with the military establishment signaled the start of a new social contract; psychologists sought to broaden their base of social support by marketing their expertise more widely.<sup>5</sup>

From 1945 to 1970 membership in the APA grew from a little over four thousand, to over thirty thousand members – more than a six-fold increase. Some historians credit that growth to the success of organized psychology in serving the military during the war.

## **FEDERAL SPENDING AND THE COLD WAR**

Psychologists received substantial funding from the military with the advent of the Cold War. The Navy formed the Office of Naval Research (ONR) to channel new funds to social science research programs. In the first five years after the war, the ONR provided \$2 million per year of funded research to psychologists (a present day value of \$16 million).<sup>6</sup> Navy funding generated new areas of specialty in the field that had “been virtually nonexistent before the war,”<sup>7</sup> including attitude measurements, leadership and small group theory, and as well as others. These specialties are now integrated broadly into the academic discipline of psychology. In addition, the ONR established one of the first APA approved internships. New psychologists could now begin their careers with a direct affiliation to the U.S. military.

The Army as well, through its Army Research Institution for the Behavioral and Social Sciences (ARI), funded extensive research into behavioral science. At its peak, ARI sponsored more than 100 research behavioral scientists, most of them psychologists, to study the stresses of military life at the Army's flagship research hospital, Walter Reed, in Washington, D.C. ARI also funded research at universities and private contract research centers.

From 1945 until 1960, the Department of Defense (DoD) was the largest institutional sponsor of psychological research. By 1960, the DoD was spending almost its entire social science research budget on psychology, \$15 million (\$120 million in current dollars). By 1952, DoD spending accounted for 78% of all federal funding to psychology.

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<sup>5</sup> Evans, Sexton, and Cadwallader, 171.

<sup>6</sup> Frank Summers, “Making Sense of the APA: A History of the Relationship Between Psychology and the Military,” *Psychoanalytic Dialogues* 18 (2008), 619.

<sup>7</sup> Summers, 619.

## MILITARY-FUNDED PSYCHOLOGICAL RESEARCH

The Cold War opened the door to new areas of psychological research. Mind control was at the forefront of the military's research priorities. The DoD spent several billion dollars between 1950 and 1963 to investigate suspected mind control techniques developed by the Soviet Union. As part of this work, the military funded several now-controversial projects, including behavioral research regarding the effects of LSD on unwitting human subjects.

One of the most controversial CIA-funded projects was Society for the Investigation of Human Ecology (later the Human Ecology Fund) at Cornell University. Psychologists and psychiatrists studied mind-control techniques, including the effects of sleep deprivation and forced standing, techniques that communist regimes had used.<sup>8</sup> Prominent psychologists, including Dr. Donald Hebb who went on to become APA president, received federal grants to pursue sensory deprivation research. Some of that research was later revealed to be funded directly by the CIA.<sup>9</sup> Hebb's studies concluded that even after only short-term deprivation participants suffered devastating psychological effects. ONR and CIA funded scores of additional sensory deprivation studies after Hebb published his report in 1954, which resulted in a substantial body of literature documenting the topic.

The Human Resources Research Organization (HumRRO) was established in 1951 at the George Washington University to conduct behavioral research for the U.S. Army. The organization conducted research on "radical isolation," identifying previously unobserved effects on hallucinations, mood, and subjective stress.<sup>10</sup> Later restructured as a non-profit organization, the research unit remains active and enjoys close ties to the APA. The chairman of the HumRRO Board was former general counsel to the APA; its President and CEO, Dr. William Strickland, is currently the representative of the Division of Military Psychologists to the APA.

Beginning in the 1960s, the military also funded behavioral science studies of insurgency movements. One such study was Project Camelot. Funneling money through a National Science Foundation Grant, the DoD hoped to study the insurgency movements of Latin America to

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<sup>8</sup> Summers, 622; Patricia Greenfield, "CIA's Behavior Caper," *APA Monitor*, December 1977: 1, 10-11.

<sup>9</sup> Alfred W. McCoy, "Science in Dachau's Shadow: Hebb, Beecher, and the Development of CIA Psychological Torture and Modern Medical Ethics," *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 43, 405.

<sup>10</sup> Summers, 623.

identify the root causes of armed revolutionary movements.<sup>11</sup> The military sought to understand how these groups worked in an attempt to predict social instability and identify interventions governments could employ to maintain power. Project Camelot became public in 1965, and widespread debate emerged within the psychological community. Some criticized the military patronage of the profession while others defended the role of psychologists in promoting national security efforts.

The influence of the military on psychological research has been undeniable and mutually reinforcing. Veterans Administration hospitals continue to serve as a primary system of training for psychologists and providing counseling to the nation's scarred war veterans. A recent study of veterans from Operations Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan and Iraqi Freedom showed that of the over 100,000 soldiers who received care at VA facilities, a quarter received mental health diagnoses.<sup>12</sup> In addition, the military has supported efforts of organized psychology to obtain the authority to prescribe medication. In 1991, the DoD began the Psychopharmacology Demonstration Project (PDP), aimed at training psychologists to provide prescriptions for psychotropic medication. Although the military abandoned the project in 1997, the program signaled important DoD backing of the APA's efforts to gain prescription privileges for its members.

## **PSYCHOLOGISTS AND POST-9/11 COUNTER-TERRORISM EFFORTS**

Following the September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attacks, the Bush Administration developed new, aggressive interrogation tactics to produce actionable intelligence from detained terrorism suspects. In 2002, a handful of psychologists helped to design and implement these new, aggressive, interrogation techniques. The Survival Evasion Resistance Escape (SERE) School operated by the Army at Ft. Bragg, North Carolina became a site for the development of "enhanced" techniques to be used on captured terrorism suspects. The SERE program was established at the end of the Korean War to train American soldiers, such as pilots and field intelligence operatives, in how to resist torture techniques to induce confessions should they fall

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<sup>11</sup> Mark Solovey, "Project Camelot and the 1960s Epistemological Revolution: Rethinking the Politics-Patronage-Social Science Nexus," *Social Studies of Science* 31.

<sup>12</sup> Karen H. Seal, Daniel Bertenthal, Christian Miner, Saunak Sen and Charles Marmar, "Brining the War Back Home: Mental Health Disorders Among 103,788 US Veterans Returning From Iraq and Afghanistan Seen at Department of Veterans Affairs Facilities," *Archives of Internal Medicine* 167 (2007).

into enemy hands.<sup>13</sup> In December 2001, DoD officials requested information on the training methods used in the SERE school to aid the exploitation of detainees.<sup>14</sup> A SERE psychologist, Dr. Bruce Jessen, was instrumental in reverse engineering SERE tactics to develop an “exploitation oriented” approach to be used to interrogate detainees. This was one of the first known instances of a psychologist being involved in the design of controversial interrogation practices.

By June 2002, the military was ready to put these newly-developed tactics to use on suspected Taliban and Al Qaeda fighters captured primarily in Afghanistan and detained at the U.S. Naval Base in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba. Michael Dunlavey, the Commander of Joint Task Force (JTF) -170, redirected a group of mental health professionals who formed a Behavioral Science Consultation Team (BSCT), originally assigned to oversee the mental health of soldiers at Guantánamo, to support interrogation operations.<sup>15</sup>

The BSCT personnel were not trained in interrogation, but their perceived expertise in human behavior was believed to be useful to the interrogation process. BSCT psychologists flew to the SERE School and received training on the SERE methods that they adapted to interrogate Guantánamo detainees. BSCT psychologists at Guantánamo used what they had learned at Ft. Bragg to craft “interrogation plans.” Psychologists, in a memo they helped draft, suggested using detainee phobias and other harsh methods to elicit greater cooperation.<sup>16</sup> Some were alleged to have sat in on the interrogations of detainees, and made claims as to the veracity of statements made by terror suspects.<sup>17</sup>

Because many materials regarding the interrogation program remain classified, the full extent of psychologists’ participation is not publicly available. However, some documents that have appeared make clear that licensed clinical psychologists and APA members were present

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<sup>13</sup> U.S. Senate Committee on Armed Services, “Hearing to Receive Testimony on The Origins of Aggressive Interrogation Techniques: Part I of The Committee’s Inquiry into the Treatment of Detainees in U.S. Custody” (Washington, D.C., July 17, 2008).

<sup>14</sup> U.S. Senate Committee on Armed Services, “Inquiry into the Treatment of Detainees in U.S. Custody” (Washington, D.C., November 2008), 4-10.

<sup>15</sup> Inquiry into the Treatment of Detainees, 38.

<sup>16</sup> Inquiry into the Treatment of Detainees, 50-52.

<sup>17</sup> “SGT M questioned detainee about his family. Detainee was very evasive and refused to provide anything other than his family’s PO box. BSCT observation indicated that detainee was lying during entire exchange.”

“Interrogation Log: Detainee 063,” *Center for Constitutional Rights*, <http://ccrjustice.org/files/Al%20Qahtani%20Interrogation%20Log.pdf>; “The BSCT assessment and recommendation for Mr. Jawad, which is classified, is ‘chilling.” *Petitioner Mohammed Jawad's Motion to Suppress His Out-Of-Court Statements*, Civil Action No. 05-2385 (District Court for the District of Columbia, 07 02, 2009).

and in some instances deeply involved in abusive interrogation practices that in some cases constituted torture. Foremost among the available evidence is the Senate Armed Services Committee Report from 2010, entitled “Inquiry into the Treatment of Detainees in US Custody.” Psychologists’ involvement in enhanced interrogation practices are chronicled throughout its over 250 pages. Court documents revealed in the ongoing detainee litigation also highlight mistreatment, such as in the case of Mohammed Jawad, a juvenile detainee subjected to sleep deprivation and isolation. Evidence shows BSCT personnel recommending techniques to “break the will” of the prisoner and “devastate him emotionally.”<sup>18</sup>

## **APA RESPONDS**

As the news of detainee abuse began to appear in 2004, many psychologists balked at reports that psychologists had participated in harsh interrogations, some of which appeared to cross the line to torture. For example, a leaked report of the International Committee of the Red Cross revealed that Guantánamo medical personnel had been providing information on the health of the detainees to BSCT members, who would then advise on the detainee interrogations.<sup>19</sup> More details have been revealed over time. Many psychologists were convinced that this involvement of psychologists in detainee interrogations violated fundamental ethical principles, such as the “do no harm” imperative enshrined in the APA ethics code. Others were shocked that psychologists with no experience in interrogations had advised on interrogation tactics, undermining the professional reputation of psychology as a scientific field based in empirical research and evidence. Members of the APA turned to the organization to investigate and sanction individuals who had participated in these activities.

Their efforts quickly met roadblocks. The APA ethics code had been revised in 2002. The revised section 1.02 stated that in circumstances in which there was a conflict between professional ethics and the law, “psychologists may adhere to the requirements of the law, regulations, or other governing legal authority.” This change, which some labeled a “Nuremberg

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<sup>18</sup> Petitioner Mohammed Jawad, 15-17

<sup>19</sup> ICRC Report on the Treatment of Fourteen ‘High Value Detainees’ in CIA Custody, February 2007. Available at <http://www.nybooks.com/icrc-report.pdf>. Also see Mathias Vermeulen, ‘New York Review of Books Posts Leaked ICRC Report in Full on Website’, *The Lift: Legal Issues in the Fight Against Terrorism*, April 8, 2009; de Vogue, ‘DOJ [Department of Justice] Releases Controversial “Torture Memos”’; and Neil A. Lewis, “Red Cross Finds Detainee Abuse in Guantánamo,” *New York Times*, November 30, 2004.

Clause” – a reference to the infamous defense used by prosecuted Nazi leaders that their actions were legal under German law of the time – allowed controversial domestic legal opinions to overrule guiding professional ethical principles. Although officially the motivation for the change was to resolve conflicts regarding confidentiality arising primarily in instances in which courts subpoena psychologists, critics cried foul. They pointed out that the ethics code already protected psychologists from disclosing confidential information in all but exceptional circumstances including “where permitted by law for a valid purpose.”<sup>20</sup> The revised section 1.02 weakened prohibitions against psychologist participation in detainee interrogations at Guantánamo Bay and elsewhere. It enabled implicated psychologists and their supporters to argue that psychologists who followed the “governing legal authority” should be shielded from sanction, regardless of the unlawful or unethical nature of that authority.

Controversy about role of psychologists continued and, in 2005, the APA commissioned a task force, the Presidential Task Force on Psychological Ethics and National Security (PENS), to further investigate the role of psychologists in national security efforts. Of the ten PENS members, six were high-level DoD or CIA employees or contractors.<sup>21</sup> The APA defended the inclusion of military and intelligence experts as necessary for a thorough examination of the issues. However, a civilian participant in the task force later revealed that the military had additional “observers” who participated in the work of the task force but who were not officially listed as participants. Included in this category were Geoff Mumford and Heather Kelley, who both applied for APA grants at the Counterintelligence Field Activity (CIFA), a DoD agency, and sought ways to further cooperation with the group. Other observers had strong ties to the government and military, including Susan Brandon, Assistant Director of Social, Behavioral, and Educational Sciences for the White House Office of Science & Technology Policy, Mel Gravitz, a former National Security Agency (NSA) Psychologist and the former Director of the Navy Internship Program,<sup>22</sup> and Russell Newman, Executive Director of the Practice Directorate of the APA whose spouse, Dr. Debra L. Dunivin, was reported to have served on a BSCT team at Guantánamo during the Task Force deliberations.<sup>23</sup> Civilian task force members felt that the

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<sup>20</sup> Kenneth S. Pope and Thomas G. Gutheil, “Psychologists Abandon the Nuremberg Ethic: Concerns for Detainee Interrogations,” *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry* 32 (2009).

<sup>21</sup> Arrigo and Long, 190-191.

<sup>22</sup> Arrigo and Long, 190.

<sup>23</sup> Jeff Kaye, “How APA Made a Pact with DoD & CIA Over Torture Interrogations,” April 28, 2009. Available at <http://firedoglake.com/2009/04/28/how-apa-made-a-pact-with-dod-cia-over-torture-interrogations/>.



presence of members and observers associated with the military influenced the direction of the PENS report.

The PENS task force final report condemned torture and cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment of detainees but also sanctioned the ongoing direct assistance of psychologists in detainee interrogations. The task force found that domestic law should be considered the relevant legal authority, rather than heightened international law standards. The report noted psychologists' role in interrogations as helping society, not just individuals.<sup>24</sup> This reframing of the issue potentially blurred the strict "do no harm" imperative and paved the way for the continued involvement of psychologists in classified military investigations.

Since the PENS report was published, there has been ongoing, intense debate within the APA over the role of psychologists in national security. Many psychologists condemn the conclusions of the task force, such as former APA president, Philip Zimbardo. He noted in an open letter to the task force that: "A more lenient standard puts individual psychologists engaged in capacities related to military investigations at risk for 'doing harm' despite not violating their association's code of professional ethics."<sup>25</sup> Others critique the composition of the force as demonstrating ongoing bias towards military interests.<sup>26</sup> Additionally, the task force made no suggestions about how to handle the past actions committed by APA members who had assisted interrogations on the BSCT teams. In fact, the current APA president has asserted that the ethics committee's ability to investigate pending complaints is hampered by lack of access to classified materials.<sup>27</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The current debates surrounding the role of psychologists in detainee interrogations are the latest chapter in the history of the relationship between the APA and the military. In February of 2010, the APA amended ethics code section 1.02 to state psychologists must "take *reasonable* steps to

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<sup>24</sup> American Psychological Association, "Report of the American Psychological Association Presidential Task Force on Psychological Ethics and National Security," 2005.

<sup>25</sup> Philip G. Zimbardo, "Thoughts on Psychologists, Ethics, and the Use of Torture in Interrogations: Don't Ignore Varying Roles and Complexities," *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy* 7, no. 1 (2007), 7. Zimbardo's standing in the debate is subject to criticism as Section 1.02 was revised while he was APA president.

<sup>26</sup> Arrigo and Long, 195.

<sup>27</sup> Carol Goodheart, "Email Communication Regarding APA Ethics Complaints" (January 2010).

resolve the conflict [between ethics and the law] *consistent with the General Principles and Ethical Standards of the Ethics Code*,” rather than following any governing legal authority. In a stance against torture in that same section, it stated, “under no circumstances may [the ethical conflict] be used to justify or defend violating human rights.” Further, the APA ethics committee has specifically condemned psychologists’ participation in administering abusive interrogation tactics.<sup>28</sup> Yet the ethics committee has not sanctioned any APA member for participation in interrogations, and debate continues over the appropriate role of psychologists in national security. Given the deep ties between the military and the APA, the internal struggle within professional association to strike the right balance may continue for some time.

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<sup>28</sup> American Psychological Association, *APA Ethics Committee Statement - No Defense to Torture* , June 2009, <http://www.apa.org/ethics/programs/statement/torture-code.aspx> (accessed April 19, 2010).

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