

Report reveals American Psychological Association complicity in torture post 9/11

The Hoffman Report

In November 2014 the American Psychological Association (APA), the largest association of psychologists in the US, asked David Hoffman, a former federal prosecutor, to lead an independent review into allegations that APA had been complicit in US torture post 9/11. This was shortly before the Senate Intelligence Committee's report on the CIA's use of torture was released. Hoffman's brief was specifically to investigate claims that APA guidelines issued in 2002 and 2005 effectively sanctioned participation by psychologists in interrogation sessions involving "enhanced interrogation techniques" (torture in plain English).

Hoffman found that the Association's leaders had indeed "colluded" with the US Department of Defense and aided the CIA in loosening professional ethics so that psychologists could take part in torture. The Psychological Ethics and National Security (PENS) task group report of 2005 allowed psychologists to take part in interrogations if they adhered to US law even though they violated every international code of medical ethics.

Whistleblower vindicated

The Association had denied this for more than 10 years, but the report undermines these denials and vindicates the dissenters, including 71 year old Jean Marie Arrigo, for years ignored and subjected to a smear campaign. As long ago as 2005, Arrigo was leaned on by both the Task Force on Psychological Ethics and National Security (PENS) and members of the APA board when she challenged the APA's links with the military and appealed to the Geneva Convention. She is now being described by many in America and elsewhere as a national hero.

Resignations

The chief executive officer Norman Anderson and his deputy Michael Honeker "retired" shortly afterwards, and communications director Rhea Farberman "resigned" after 22 years' service. Although Dr Anderson's retirement had already been planned, the APA conceded that his departure was brought forward to help in "organisational healing".

The APA's former ethics chief, Stephen Behnke, has also resigned – and threatened unspecified legal action against the Association, supported by Louis J Freeh, FBI director in the Clinton administration. Behnke, a defense department contractor, was a leading figure in persuading the APA to modify its ethical guidelines to accommodate interrogations which relied on techniques such as waterboarding.

Stephen Soldz of Physicians for Human Rights, a long term critic of APA on torture, has expressed the hope that the resignations, and others which may well follow, will be "only the beginning of change".

Need and pressure for further change within the APA

APA continued to collude with the Department of Defense and the CIA until President Obama rescinded authorisation for enhanced interrogation techniques shortly after coming into office. It did not change its guidelines on interrogations until 2013, even though the American Medical Association and the American Psychiatric Association had both

prohibited their members from taking part in interrogations as long ago as 2006. APA even declined to rebuke a member who took part in the brutal interrogation of one of the suspected 9/11 hijackers because the interrogation took place before APA declared its opposition to such practices. It now proclaims its “unequivocal condemnation of all techniques considered torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment”.

The APA meets in Toronto for its annual convention on 6 August, which is expected to be dominated by the Hoffman Report, and will have much to do rebuilding its image.

Not so in the Pentagon?

Despite the Hoffman Report, and the declared desire of the APA to end its relationship with the Pentagon, five psychologists said to have participated in forced tube feedings are set to remain at Guantanamo Bay. Former APA president Nadine Kaslow has declared that the group needs to adopt a policy to prohibit psychologists from being involved in interrogation of people being held in military custody at Gitmo and other sites. The APA board will be urged at its annual conference to adopt such a policy. Yet a Pentagon spokesperson is on record as saying “We are not aware of any changes concerning the use of mental health professionals in support of detention operations at the detention facilities at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.” The same spokesperson confirmed that five psychologists currently work for the Guantanamo detentions taskforce. They are involved at the facility's behavioral health unit and participate in some capacity in the forced feedings administered to detainees on hunger strike. Abu Wael Dhiab, a long term hunger striker, failed last year to persuade the federal court to end the forced feedings. He was released without charge in December 2014. A judge has recently ordered the release of videos of forced feedings, in disregard of objections from the US Justice Department.

What purpose did it all serve?

Although it is likely that few interrogations currently take place at Guantanamo, the FBI has not responded to questions about the continued use of psychologists with the High Value Detainee Interrogation Group (HIG). Prisoners were broken and the psychologists and other perpetrators involved were protected, yet no useful intelligence was obtained. Even the Senate Select Committee report on CIA torture concedes that.

It couldn't happen again – could it?

If all this seems related to a previous time, and on the other side of the Atlantic, there are surely concerns we should be raising. Even now, there is more unknown than known about CIA torture around the world, and how far complicity in it may have spread. Most of the Senate report on torture, and most of the photographs and videotapes of torture at Guantanamo, Iraq, Afghanistan and around the world have not been released.

To date only four of fourteen presidential candidates have said that they would keep President Obama's executive order banning torture.

Informing Yourself

The Hoffman Report can be read in full on *The Guardian* website, so it is not difficult to inform yourself. Have a look at it. If its 542 pages seem a little daunting, the main points and matters arising from them, are well covered in commentary and analysis on *The Guardian* website, and there is a much shorter report in *Last Week Tonight on You Tube*.

What can be done?

One of the most chilling comments on the whole affair came from Garrett Koren, writing for *The Guardian* on 13 July, on the differing positions of physicians and psychiatrists.

Physicians are protected by the Hippocratic Oath, which includes the words “I will take care that they suffer no hurt or damage”. Psychologists have no equivalent of the Hippocratic Oath. Indeed, prison psychologists, although not normally armed, could, in the event of a riot or an escape, be required to open fire on their own patients. Surely, it is time that psychologists had their own equivalent to the Hippocratic Oath.

In Argentina, Brazil, Chile and other countries, clinicians who tortured have been held accountable, but not in the US. What is going on now around the world, and where do America's allies, including the UK, stand on all this?

Although not specifically referring to interrogation, The British Psychological Society's 2014 *Ethics and Standards code of human research ethics* refers to the desirability of informed consent, the safeguarding of vulnerable people and of minimising harm. After what happened in the US should such safeguards be strengthened?

The European Federation of Psychologists' Association issued a statement regarding the Hoffman report on 13 July 2015, in which it asked its Board of Ethics and Task Force on Human Rights to study the report and make recommendations about what can be done to prevent similar situations in Europe. If you are, or were, a psychologist, support this. Whatever your present or former profession, you may wish to contact your MP, calling on the British government to respond similarly.

After the release of the CIA report referred to in the first paragraph of this briefing a report in *The Independent* called for a full and transparent investigation into the role of doctors in the CIA, and investigation by European nations of related events in Europe. These demands still stand.

Sources of information

As mentioned above, the Hoffman report itself, and lots of further comment can be consulted by going to the *Guardian* website under torture.

The CIA report of December 2014 was reported in *The Independent*. See <http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/comment/cia-torture-who-umpired-in-this-theatre-of-human-misery-9918635.html>.

See also *The Independent* on 10 December 2014 calling for an investigation of European involvement in the activities of the CIA.

J. Wesley Boyd in Newsweek 18 July 2015. See <http://www.newsweek.com/how-the-largest-association-us-psychologists-colluded-torture-354870>

European Federation of Psychologists' Association See <http://www.efpa/news>

Briefings are prepared and edited on behalf of Q-CAT Trustees by
John Cockcroft jandbcockcroft@talktalk.net Barbara Forbes forbesbarbarae@yahoo.co.uk

The next Newsletter is planned for early September
The next Briefing is planned for mid-October

Webside: www.q-cat.org.uk