

American Psychological Association Emails Expose Direct Ties to CIA Torture Program

PHR calls for Department of Justice investigation

By [Physicians for Human Rights](#)

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Physicians for Human Rights (PHR) again urged the U.S. Department of Justice to investigate the American Psychological Association's (APA) complicity in the CIA torture program, following a [new report](#) in today's New York Times. Internal emails obtained by Times reporter James Risen clearly show that the APA secretly modified its ethics policy to endorse psychologist participation in torture, with the aid of CIA and White House personnel.

"This calculated undermining of professional ethics is unprecedented in the history of U.S. medical practice and shows how the CIA torture program corrupted other institutions in our society," said Donna McKay, PHR's executive director.

"Psychologists must never use their knowledge of human behavior to harm or undermine individuals. The Justice Department must look into any crimes or violations that may have been committed. It's equally critical for psychologists to reclaim the principles of their profession and to reassert the values of human rights in psychology."

PHR has repeatedly called on the APA to clarify its ties to the CIA torture program and its architects, including CIA contract psychologists James Mitchell (a former APA member) and Bruce Jessen. PHR said it looked forward to the findings of an [independent investigation](#) into the APA's collusion with the CIA expected in summer 2015. In the meantime, there is sufficient evidence of wrongdoing to warrant a Department of Justice investigation.

PHR first called for an investigation into APA ethics policies in 2009, after a [leaked APA email listserv](#) revealed that most members of the secret 2005 APA Presidential Task Force on Psychological Ethics and National Security (PENS) had U.S. military and intelligence affiliations. Since then, additional email disclosures and related analysis – [including articles by Risen](#) – have exposed coordinated efforts by APA, CIA, and White House officials to bring key portions of APA ethics policy in line with the legal and operational needs of the George Bush-era torture program.

"By revising its ethics policies in order to align with the CIA's torture practices, the American Psychological Association effectively endorsed psychologist participation in CIA torture," said Widney Brown, PHR's director of programs. "This supported the Bush administration's spurious claim that brutal interrogation practices were 'safe, effective, and legal.' The APA's complicity is a betrayal of the fundamental duty of all health professionals – to do no harm."

Risen's latest article discloses the purpose behind the changes made to the APA's ethics policy, drawing on a [new analysis](#) by a team of independent psychological, medical, and human rights experts. The APA's 2005 PENS Task Force policy revisions reversed a longstanding policy to specifically endorse psychologist research into and monitoring of interrogations – including defining “[what constitutes cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment](#).” This language comported with the then still-classified [Department of Justice “torture memos,”](#) which concluded that certain techniques would not violate the ban on “cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment” if subjected to medical monitoring. Yet, at the time, the CIA Office of Medical Services objected to playing such a role. This legal indemnification strategy was therefore written into APA ethics policy, with the direct involvement of the CIA and a former behavioral science advisor for the Bush White House.

Since 2005, PHR has documented the systematic use of psychological and physical torture of national security detainees by U.S. personnel in a series of [groundbreaking reports](#). Dr. [Stephen Soldz](#), lead author of the APA email analysis referenced in the *New York Times* article, is anti-torture advisor to PHR and has collaborated on several of the reports. PHR has repeatedly called for an end to the torture and ill-treatment of detainees by the United States, a federal investigation into the role of health professionals in the U.S. torture program, and full criminal and professional accountability for any health professionals found to have participated.

Physicians for Human Rights (PHR) is a New York-based advocacy organization that uses science and medicine to stop mass atrocities and severe human rights violations. [Learn more here.](#)

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