



June 18, 2008

Stephen Behnke  
Director, Ethics Office  
American Psychological Association  
750 First St., NE  
Washington D.C. 20002-4242

Dear Dr. Behnke:

Thank you for your letter of May 15, 2008. The ACLU appreciates the APA's willingness to exchange views about the ethical obligations of psychologists in relation to the interrogation of prisoners, and we welcome your condemnation of torture and prisoner abuse. We do not, however, agree with your conclusion that documents recently obtained by the ACLU through its Freedom of Information Act Litigation demonstrate that the APA's "policy of engagement served the intended purpose" of stopping unethical interrogations. Rather, we are deeply concerned by the fact that, viewed in context, those documents warrant the opposite conclusion.

An unredacted portion of the Church report obtained by the ACLU states that "[a]nalagous to the BSCT [Behavioral Science Consultation Teams] in Guantanamo Bay, the Army has a number of psychologists in operational positions (in both Afghanistan and Iraq) mostly within Special Operations, where they provide direct support to military operations. They do not function as mental health providers, and one of their core missions is to support interrogations." This passage is troubling because government documents and media reports confirm that psychologists who were part of BSCT and the Army's Special Operations Command Psychological Directorate aided in the development of highly abusive SERE (Search Evasion Resistance Escape) methods for use on prisoners held in Guantanamo Bay. Recent revelations relating to a Senate Armed Services Committee Investigation confirm that military psychologists contributed to the development of abusive interrogation methods. Leaked interrogation logs also show that a BSCT psychologist was present during the highly abusive interrogation of Guantanamo prisoner Mohammed al Qahtani. Moreover, government records show that special forces—to whom psychologists were attached—used SERE methods and were implicated in numerous incidents of torture and prisoner abuse in Iraq and Afghanistan. The documents now in the public domain make clear that the use of SERE methods can have devastating psychological and physical effects.

As evidence that the APA's policy of engagement is working, your letter cites a single instance referenced in the Church report in which a psychologist

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recommended that an interrogation not proceed. However, we believe that the public record presents a much more troubling account, and that when viewed in the context of that record, the Church report suggests that psychologists may have been complicit in abusive interrogations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The question, then, is how to prevent a repetition of those events so that psychologists are not using their professional skills to facilitate coercive interrogation techniques. I would be happy to meet to discuss these issues further at your convenience.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Anthony D. Romero', written over a horizontal line.

Anthony D. Romero  
Executive Director

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