

Opening Comments to the American Psychological Association (APA) Board of Directors

by [Stephen Soldz - Steven Reisner](#)

July 13, 2015

In October 2014, New York Times reporter James Risen published allegations of American Psychological Association (APA) complicity in the Bush-era torture program in his book, Pay Any Price: Greed, Power, and Endless War. In the wake of these revelations, the APA Board in November 2014 commissioned an independent investigation of these allegations. This investigation was conducted by Chicago attorney and former federal prosecutor, David Hoffman of Sidley Austin LLC and his colleagues.

In late June, 2015, as the APA Board prepared to receive the Hoffman Report, they asked to meet with us [Steven Reisner and Stephen Soldz]. We presume we were asked because over the last nine years we have been leaders of the movement to remove psychologists from abusive and sometimes torturous national security interrogations. Further, we have researched and published extensively on these issues and shared the results of our research with Hoffman and his team. Most recently, we were the psychologist coauthors of the [report](#) All the President's Psychologists: The American Psychological Association's Secret Complicity with the White House and US Intelligence Community in Support of the CIA's "Enhanced" Interrogation Program, which was featured in a May 1, 2015 New York Times [article](#).

The Board requested and we agreed to keep the substance of our discussions confidential until the Hoffman Report became public. With the public release in the [New York Times](#) of the [Report](#), we are now free to speak. Below are our opening comments at a July 2, 2015 two-hour meeting with the Board. They have been minimally edited for enhanced clarity.

Stephen Soldz Comments

Thank you for having us here. I wish it was under less disturbing circumstances. We have come to discuss with you what we believe needs to be done by the American Psychological Association (APA) in the wake of the imminent release of the Hoffman Report. The conditions of confidentiality requested by the Board and agreed to by us have precluded our being able to discuss our ideas with our colleagues who have joined us for the last decade in our attempts to unveil the web of collusion beneath APA's policies and actions regarding psychologist participation in sometimes abusive national security interrogations. However, our ideas have benefited from hundreds of hours of discussion with colleagues regarding the steps necessary to put APA on an ethical course. We believe that these ideas reflect those of many others besides ourselves, though we also consider it vital that the voices of those many others be actively heard as we proceed.

I would like to make some opening comments, following which Steven Reisner will describe our ideas for the initial steps needed for APA to right itself and weather the storm that is just over the horizon. We would like to emphasize that these comments and ideas were put down less than 48 hours after we obtained access to the 500-plus page Report. Neither of us has even read the entire

Report, much less absorbed it. Thus, these ideas are preliminary and may well be supplemented by others as we fully absorb the Report and discuss with colleagues what should be done.

Summary of the Report

I would like to begin with a very brief summary of what we take to be the gist of this Report. The Report documents in exhaustive detail the existence of a years long conspiracy to engage in collusion between senior leadership in the APA and the intelligence community, including the CIA and, most notably, the Department of Defense (DOD). This collusion involves a two-pronged strategy by the APA. First, there was a concerted attempt to generate so-called “ethical” policies on psychologist involvement in interrogations that would provide no constraints whatsoever on psychologists in the military working for DOD and other agencies. The second prong consisted of an elaborate deceptive and dishonest public relations strategy to falsely portray APA policy as concerned with the protection of detainee welfare and human rights.

This collusion included the development of apparently fine-sounding policy statements that were, as the Report documents, virtually always vetted directly by DOD officials; manipulation of critics of APA policy to ensure that attempts to change that policy were toothless and did not in fact challenge DOD policies or practices; a strategic decision to turn heads away from increasing evidence on torture and other detainee abuse, including homicides, and on psychologist involvement in that abuse; and the dismissal and/or failure to investigate in any serious way ethical complaints against psychologists alleged to have participated in abusive interrogations, accompanied by repeated assurances from APA officials that all complaints would be comprehensively investigated. This collusion was accompanied by systematic manipulation of APA governance procedures, the active solicitation of opposition to critics by APA staff, and even the recording, in at least two known instances, of falsely claimed “unanimous” votes.

This years-long collusion was accompanied by false statements from every Board and every elected President over the last decade denying the existence of the collusion described in such detail by Mr. Hoffman. The collusion was also accompanied by squelching of critics and, sometimes, by personal attacks upon them in the face of overwhelming evidence in the public record, including media reports and the results of multiple government investigations by Congress and other agencies. Most notable, are the vicious personal attacks upon PENS Task Force member and national hero Jean Maria Arrigo, who first revealed the collusion, attacks that in one case was distributed widely by the president of the Association; responses to those attacks went unanswered by that President or any other Association official.

Other critics have been banned from state psychological association listservs; been attacked by an APA president in the official Monitor on Psychology as “opportunistic commentators masquerading as scholars;” been threatened with possible libel suits and ethics complaints; been disinvited from speaking to and writing for state psychological associations; been surreptitiously recorded by APA staff when having a private conversation with reporters; had venues where they were speaking criticized and even implicitly threatened with loss of accreditation; and called “clowns” in a national psychological newspaper by an individual given numerous awards by APA and its divisions and who is often in APA governance. This, sadly, is only a partial list of the attacks on critics. In none of these instances did people in APA leadership positions stand up to defend the right of critics to speak. These actions were all undertaken against those who sought

to uncover the collusion that was denied by Association leadership, including this Board and the current CEO only a few months ago.

Implications of the Report

That is the background to our meeting today to discuss how the APA should respond to the crisis facing the Association, the profession, and the country. I suspect that some of you have not yet fully grasped the magnitude of this crisis. As the result of its collusion, the APA is likely to become the public face of torture. The press storm will be fierce. Editorials will condemn the Association's actions. Congress members will weigh in. Human rights groups, frustrated with the lack of accountability for torture, will be lining up to raise money off of suing the APA. There may be a decade of lawsuits, draining the budget and staff and elected officials' time. Members will flee and young psychologists will be even more reluctant to join. And the Association's 501(c)(3) nonprofit status may be threatened.

More importantly, if not handled correctly, torture collusion will become the public face of the profession we love. There is little doubt that the APA's actions will go down in history books next to the chapter on the Tuskegee and Guatemalan syphilis experiments. The actions we take in the coming weeks, months, and years will determine how that chapter ends.

Principles to Guide APA Response

I would like to end by outlining what I believe are the fundamental principles that should guide the APA's actions forward. These are: *Contrition*, *Accountability*, *Transparency*, *Inclusiveness*, and *Genuine Change*. Notice that I did *not* list "healing" or "reconciliation." Healing and reconciliation are needed, certainly, but this is not the time to talk of them. Before healing can start, we need painful surgery to remove the tumor that our work and the Hoffman Report demonstrate have been at the heart of the APA for the last decade.

Now Steven Reisner will describe the preliminary steps necessary to start removing this tumor.

Steven Reisner Comments

Following on Stephen's comments I want to reiterate: There is a cancer on the APA. You here will have to decide whether to do the necessary surgery or whether you will preside over the death of the Association.

Issues Related to APA Conduct

There are four issues here:

1. The APA sacrificed its reputation and independence – perhaps its 501c3 tax exempt status – to align its policies with those of the CIA and the DOD. This was an active campaign, with constant behind the scenes consultation, in order to do the bidding of these agencies, first the CIA, then the DOD.

2. There was an active campaign to undermine the will of the membership and of the council when they attempted to institute ethical restrictions on such activity. Simultaneously efforts were made to prop up and expand opposing efforts in support of such activity. Sometimes efforts were made to create opposing efforts to such activity. Thus APA ceased being a member-driven or democratic organization. The letter and spirit of the organizations by-laws were thwarted in favor of this secret agenda pushed by a staff that is supposed to be neutral and facilitative of the will of membership and governance. Instead staff manipulated the council and the membership.

3. There was a public relations campaign directed to deceive the public and to manipulate governance. To the public the PR campaign made the false claims that APA was acting independently for human rights at the behest of its membership, while in fact it was doing the opposite. Within the organization there was a campaign to influence and manipulate those who opposed the policy or were uninformed and to bully those who would not be manipulated.

4. All of this was done to advance a program of torture and abuse. It continued long after that program and the psychologists' role in that program were public knowledge. If this level of manipulation and deception were done solely to secretly promote a government agenda, it would be a scandal; the fact that it was done to support torture and abusive monitoring of and research on detainees, is more than a scandal – it reaches the level of support for war crimes and crimes against humanity.

The numbers of APA staff and members of governance involved actively in this disgrace is staggering. It began with a few and rapidly incorporated increasing numbers from top to bottom.

Before I lay out what we believe APA must do, I want to make clear what you are dealing with. If the Report is released on July 20th, there will be front-page articles in every major newspaper in this country and around the world on July 21st.

The headlines will read: *“Report Finds APA Leadership Colluded With Bush Administration in Support of Torture.”*

What will the subheading read: *“Many named remain in leadership positions”* or *“APA removes tainted leadership in response to investigation”*?

This is not a PR problem. This is a survival of the Association problem. And there is no good way to get through this. You will face numerous lawsuits and secondary investigations. You will face a hemorrhage of membership and the loss of public trust. And APA is going to lose its central leadership of the past decade and a half.

Essential Steps for APA Survival

I will now follow on Stephen's list of five essential categories of steps that must be taken if the Association has a chance of surviving: *Contrition, Accountability, Transparency, Inclusiveness, and Genuine Change.*

Contrition

Let's be clear that contrition is not a PR maneuver. Contrition requires thoroughgoing acknowledgement, remorse and change. APA must publicly acknowledge the depth and scope of this failure.

Apology to all affected – to the people harmed (detainees), it includes the public and the congress (for not upholding public trust and deceiving them), to the profession, members, former member and non-members for undermining our ethical foundations, opening us up to ridicule and scorn, and damaging our reputation. And to Jean Maria Arrigo.

I would like to see an op-ed written by APA leadership in the *[New York] Times* expressing this contrition.

Accountability and Housecleaning

- * Staff involved must be fired.
- * Members involved must be banned from governance
- * Bring ethics charges where appropriate.
- * More importantly, APA must publicly recommend state ethics charges where appropriate.
- * Make sure there is no hint of conflicts of interest in any part of governance or staff
- * Those found to be part of the collusion should be stripped of Association awards, standing and honors.
- * And then you can give a special award to Jean Maria for being willing to stand up to an onslaught of power and manipulation that no one in this room was willing to stand up to.

I will start with staff. I see that some of the people who need to go are in this room. [Note: This turned out to be untrue. None of those people were, in fact, in the room, as they were recused from deliberations on this issue.] That in itself tells me that you don't really yet understand the seriousness of your situation. I want to say that this list is possibly incomplete, because I haven't yet read every page of the Report:

* Staff to be fired: Norman Anderson, L. Michael Honaker, Nathalie Gilfoyle, Rhea Farberman, Ellen Garrison, Heather Kelly, Geoffrey Mumford, Stephen Behnke.

* Governance prohibition effective immediately: Ron Levant, Gerald Koocher, Morgan Banks, Debra Dunivin, Olivia Moorehead-Slaughter, Larry James, Pat DeLeon, Michael Gelles, Russ Newman, Mel Gravitz, Scott Shumate, Steve Breckler, Judy Strassberger, Robert Sternberg, Joseph Matarrazo, Barry Anton.

* Recusal for conflict of interest and investigation of role required: William Strickland.

APA needs to recommend to its Divisions and State Associations that they do the same.

But housecleaning is a small piece of what is necessary for full accountability: *How do we hold leadership and governance itself accountable? How do we answer the question, how did this happen and what must we do to insure it doesn't happen again?*

We must have a thoroughgoing and independent institutional review. We need to appoint a blue ribbon panel to evaluate the organizational processes, structures, procedures and culture that allowed this to happen.

The panel must recommend changes in processes, structures and procedures geared to preventing this kind of power manipulation from happening again. It must review APA's overly close ties to military, intelligence agencies and government; it must in particular look at the potential for corruption in the directorates, in particular the ethics office, the ethics committee and the science directorate. It must investigate the APA voting processes and investigate the opaque entity that counts our votes: Intelliscan.

It must further address:

- * The power of staff and how it oversteps its institutional bounds
- * The progressive minimization of the oversight role and authority of Council and restore its authority and responsibility
- * Investigate how staff managed to impede the will of Council and prevent it from happening again (e.g., 1.02, statute of limitations)

We need a committee of ethicists to redesign APA ethics policy and procedures. It may be true that 1.02 was not changed with torture in mind; the fact that it and other standards were weakened under the influence of APAIT [APA Insurance Trust] is a second scandal unto itself that must be investigated. We also need to reopen ethics cases closed as part of this conspiracy. And if those to be investigated are no longer members, we must recommend state board investigation.

There must be a financial accounting, including DOD, CIA and government money, awards, fellowships and quid pro quos.

We must refer this Report and its findings to the FBI and we must cooperate fully in any ensuing investigation.

We must also refer the report to the appropriate Congressional committees, as per Senator Feinstein's request. These committees include Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, the Senate Armed Services Committee, Senate Judiciary Committee, and Senate Committee Health and Human Services — and their counterparts in the House of Representatives (like the PENS Report).

Policy Change

All policies regarding APA and national security must be annulled, including the approval of operational psychology as a subspecialty.

Review of the ethics of national security and operational psychology:

- * Blue ribbon panel no. 2 to do a thoroughgoing independent ethical review of the role of psychologists in national security operations. Jean Maria Arrigo should be a part of such a panel, along with internationally recognized medical ethicists and human rights advocates.

- * Moratorium on participation in national security interrogation and detention operations during the review process.

- * No statute of limitation on TCID [torture and cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment] ethics charges, automatic ethics committee investigation for TCID charges when these arise in the context of national security operations, detention or interrogation activities.

We need to develop guidelines for undertaking such investigations.

For non-Members, APA has to recommend full investigation from the state boards in national security sites and offer them guidelines.

Transparency

Let this be the last time that APA discussions of such import are held in secret. We need to make all such discussions transparent and easily accessible.

We also need to report in plain language:

- * The salaries and perks of staff

- * The lobbying APA does

- * Who gets to represent APA to Congress and government and how such people are chosen

- * Anything else members of Council, the membership, or the public wants to know or should be informed of

We need to make all our deliberations and actions transparent, including these discussions.

We should have APA books publish the Hoffman Report. *The American Psychologist* and the *Monitor* should publish the Executive Summary.

We should deposit the entire record of the Hoffman investigation deposited into the APA PENS Debate Collection at the archive of the University of Colorado at Boulder.

And we should call for a congressional investigation into the role of health professionals and health professional organizations roles in support of the torture program and invite the other health professional organizations to do the same.

Inclusiveness

All stakeholders must be represented in these discussions. These include the broader psychological community, including those who opposed now-tainted APA actions when they occurred and the hundreds or thousands who quit the APA because they recognized this complicity while the elected leadership and staff denied it. In addition, equally important stakeholders are the medical ethics community, human rights advocates, Congress (as seen by the expressed desire of Sen. Feinstein to review the Report), and the broader public, as attested to by the extensive press interest in our April report. All of these have a stake in the decisions and initiatives you and we undertake today and in the coming weeks.

Ultimately, and importantly, we must set aside a time in August for a lengthy Town Hall Meeting at the convention where we give the membership a chance to discuss these revelations.

Genuine Change

???

Whether this occurs will be determined by what you decide today and in the coming days and weeks.

*[Stephen Soldz, Ph.D.](#) is a clinical psychologist, psychoanalyst, and research methodologist. He is Professor at the Boston Graduate School of Psychoanalysis and also teaches at Boston College. He is a past president of Psychologists for Social Responsibility, a cofounder of the Coalition for an Ethical Psychology, and Anti-torture Adviser for Physicians for Human Rights. Dr. Soldz has published extensively in the psychological research literature and on the intersection of psychology and social issues, including the role of psychologists in interrogations and other national security operations. He served as consultant on several Guantánamo trials. With Steven Reisner and Nathaniel Raymond, he is a lead author of [All the President's Psychologists: The American Psychological Association's Secret Complicity with the White House and US Intelligence Community in Support of the CIA's "Enhanced" Interrogation Program](#). **Steven Reisner, Ph.D.**, a clinical psychologist and psychoanalyst, is a founding member of the Coalition for an Ethical Psychology, Advisor on Psychology and Ethics for Physicians for Human Rights and past-President of Psychologists for Social Responsibility. He has been a consultant on issues of trauma, torture, political violence, disaster response and resilience in the face of catastrophic events for the United Nations, the International Criminal Court, the International Organization for Migration and other international humanitarian and mental health organizations. Dr. Reisner has authored and co-authored numerous articles on the personal and societal effects of political violence, as well as on the role of health professionals in torture and abuse. He is currently a member of the APA Council of Representatives. With Stephen Soldz and Nathaniel Raymond, he is a lead author of [All the President's Psychologists: The American Psychological Association's Secret Complicity with the White House and US Intelligence Community in Support of the CIA's "Enhanced" Interrogation Program](#).*

This PDF is from Counterpunch: <https://www.counterpunch.org/2015/07/13/opening-comments-to-the-american-psychological-association-apa-board-of-directors/>