

PSYCHOLOGISTS FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

PsySR Statement on Revelations of APA-CIA Collusion

Psychologists for Social Responsibility (PsySR) is outraged and dismayed at the revelations about the American Psychological Association in James Risen's new book. We join with other concerned groups and individuals in urgently renewing our call for an independent investigation of the APA.

In *Pay Any Price: Greed, Power, and Endless War*, Risen, a Pulitzer Prize-winning investigative reporter for the New York Times confirms what many of APA's critics have long suspected – that the CIA played a central role in directing the APA's support for psychologists' participation in "war on terror" detention and interrogation operations. With access to previously undisclosed email exchanges, Risen has at least partially exposed the nature and extent of the collusion between APA senior staff and officials from the CIA and Bush White House in the development and adoption of a post-9/11 APA policy on psychological ethics and national security. This policy, ostensibly representing the ethical voice of professional psychology, prioritized the short-term interests of the CIA and Department of Defense over human rights.

We are also disappointed in the APA's official public [response](#) to the publication of *Pay Any Price*. Like so many previous APA press releases, this statement fails to confront compelling [documentation](#) of wrongdoing by the Association's leadership. We are distressed that the APA has chosen to ignore or discount the book's most disturbing allegations as well as the evidence upon which these allegations are based. Instead of rebutting Risen's claims, the APA misstates the facts, parses the language, and distracts its readers from the very serious issues at hand.

Last week at the United Nations, the chairperson of the UN Subcommittee on the Prevention of Torture, Malcolm Evans, told the General Assembly, "There is a clear connection between torture, ill-treatment and corrupt practices." Along similar lines, Risen charges well-connected psychologists in his book with participating in the "enhanced interrogation" torture program in order to score lucrative government contracts. "The tight network of behavioral scientists so eager for CIA and Pentagon contracts," writes Risen, "showed few qualms about getting involved with institutions that were using pseudo behavioral science to brutalize prisoners." We believe these statements, taken together, help explain APA's involvement in the US torture program. Tragically and shamefully, opportunities to gain more power, prestige, and money for psychologists appear to have outweighed respect for basic human dignity.

Over five years ago, shortly after the public release of the Bush Administration's Office of Legal Counsel "torture memos" and the publication of a detailed report on detainee treatment by the Senate Armed Services Committee, PsySR issued a [statement](#) in which we emphasized the importance of determining whether the APA "knowingly cooperated with the Department of Defense and the CIA in helping to plan, facilitate, provide official justification for, or hide the use of harsh interrogation methods." Such an investigation has

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never taken place in the years since, despite the ongoing expression of concerns from human rights organizations and psychologists alike over possible APA conflicts of interest, improprieties, and wrongdoing.

As recently as January of this year, PsySR urged the APA Ethics Office in a [public letter](#) to more fully explain why a complaint filed against Guantanamo psychologist John Leso – for his alleged involvement in torture and cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment – was closed, after a seven-year delay, without even a formal review by the full Ethics Committee. In that letter, to which a response was never received, we concluded that it is reasonable for members and the broader public to conclude that the APA will never take disciplinary action against psychologists who participate in government-sanctioned abuses.

In light of the new disturbing evidence of collusion now reported in *Pay Any Price*, we recognize even more clearly that accountability and reform within APA can only be achieved through a transparent, comprehensive, and fully independent investigation. This investigation must be conducted under the direction of individuals or organizations known for their impeccable integrity. It is our hope that everyone who shares our concern about and commitment to an ethical future for the psychology profession will join us in this urgent call.

The Steering Committee of Psychologists for Social Responsibility

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