

AMERICAN
PSYCHOLOGICAL
ASSOCIATION

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Dear Editor:

Katherine Eban's piece, "Rorschach and Awe" (VF.com, July 17), makes the critical point that the coercive interrogation techniques used on some U.S. detainees are both ineffective and unethical. Over the past 20 years, the American Psychological Association (APA) has made no fewer than five statements regarding its absolute, unequivocal and emphatic prohibition against torture. APA strictly prohibits direct or indirect participation by psychologists in any act of torture or other forms of cruel, degrading or inhuman treatment or punishment.

APA condemns the use of abusive interrogation techniques by psychologists and by any individuals on behalf of the U.S. government.

Later this summer, the APA Council of Representatives will review and consider for adoption resolutions on this issue. One such resolution, put forward by the APA Board of Directors, defines specific interrogation techniques as torture, and thus prohibits these techniques in all instances. Prohibited techniques include waterboarding, mock executions, sexual humiliation, hooding, stress positions, exploitation of phobias, forced nakedness, sleep deprivation, exposure to extreme temperatures, and physical assault. This resolution will also direct the APA Ethics Committee to establish guidelines reflecting Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions and other international instruments, and will call upon the U.S. judicial system to reject testimony that results from any prohibited interrogation technique.

APA has procedures in place to investigate and adjudicate possible ethical violations by its members. Any allegation that a member has violated APA's prohibition against engaging in torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment will be investigated and, if the evidence warrants, adjudicated. As reported by Ms. Eban, psychologists associated with APA expressed strong objection to abusive interrogation techniques and have taken steps to prevent the use of such techniques. APA has no affiliation with two psychologists whom Ms. Eban portrays as having supported reverse SERE engineering. These individuals are neither APA members nor have they taken any part in APA's deliberations on this issue.

Ethical interrogations are based on building a relationship and forming rapport with the person being questioned, processes that require great skill and patience. We welcome the Senate Armed Services Committee's examination of SERE tactics in interrogations and are optimistic that this scrutiny and, it is to be hoped, future oversight, will deter our government from employing unethical and ineffective methods of interrogation.

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