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Students and alumni at Yale University are organizing against a proposed campus center to train special operations forces in interview techniques. The center would be funded by a \$1.8 million grant from the Pentagon and could open as early as April. Dubbed an "interrogation center" by critics, the facility would be housed at the Yale School of Medicine and led by Charles Morgan, a professor of psychiatry who previously conducted research on how to tell whether Arab and Muslim men are lying. We speak to two students at Yale who co-authored an editorial titled "DoD Plans are Shortsighted, Unethical," and with Michael Siegel, professor of community health sciences at Boston University School of Public Health and a 1990 graduate of the Yale School of Medicine. "Yale has now crossed a line," Siegel says. "Using the practice of medicine and medical research to help design advanced interrogation techniques, or even just regular civilian intelligence-gathering techniques, interviewing techniques, is not an appropriate use of medicine. The practice of medicine was designed to improve people's health. And the school of medicine should not be taking part in either training or research that is primarily designed to enhance military objectives."

### Guests:

[Michael Siegel](#), professor of community health sciences at Boston University School of Public Health and a 1990 graduate of the Yale School of Medicine.

**JUAN GONZÁLEZ:** We turn now to a controversy brewing at Yale University over a proposed center that would use immigrants from the surrounding community to train special operations forces in interview techniques. The center would be funded by a \$1.8 million grant from the Department of Defense and could open as early as April. It would be housed at the Yale School of Medicine and led by Charles Morgan, a professor of psychiatry who previously conducted research on how to tell whether Arab Muslim men are lying. Morgan declined our request for an interview, but in January he spoke with *The Yale Herald*. He told the paper he hopes to convince the Green Berets—some of them just back from the front lines in Afghanistan—to use noncoercive conversation methods in order to gather intelligence more effectively.

**AMY GOODMAN:** On Tuesday, Yale University issued a statement saying the center would

promote, quote, "humane and culturally respectful interview practices among a limited number of members of the armed forces." This came after graduate and undergraduate students on campus raised concerns about the lack of transparency in planning for the proposed center, its use of immigrant subjects and the presence of specially trained military operatives on campus. Alumni and members of the psychiatry profession have also spoken out against the center.

For more, we're joined by three guests. Michael Siegel, professor of community health sciences at Boston University School of Public Health and a 1990 graduate of the Yale School of Medicine, he has written to the medical school's dean to express his opposition to the proposed center because it violates its stated mission, he says. And joining us via *Democracy Now!*

videostream in New Haven, Connecticut, are Alex Lew, a sophomore at Yale University, and Nathalie Batrville, a graduate student in Yale's French Department. They co-authored an [editorial](#) titled "DoD Plans are Shortsighted, Unethical."

We welcome all of you to *Democracy Now!* Nathalie, let's begin with you. What are your concerns? What do you understand is proposed for the Yale campus at the Yale medical school?

**NATHALIE BATRAVILLE:** So we found out about this through *The Yale Herald* and the *Yale Daily News*

. We also realized later that there was an article published in *The New Yorker* about this proposed center.

And our first concern is that, you know, there was really no consultation of the student body, there was no consultation of the faculty or of representatives of the communities that these practices, these techniques are going to be—are going to be honed on, are going to be practiced on, by the military. And so, our first concern is for transparency.

And our concern is also that there has been an increase in recent years in the influence of the military in universities, in the presence of programs designed to help the military achieve its goals. And we would really like for this—you know, we would really like make an intervention in terms of drawing a line and figuring out what is ethical, what is unethical, what is the relationship, how does this affect immigrant communities in New Haven, how does this affect

the student body. And so, we'd really like more transparency, and we'd like to have an open discussion about the role of the military in the university.

**JUAN GONZÁLEZ:** And, Michael Siegel, your concerns about this? Yale University is insisting that this is much ado about nothing. On Tuesday, the university issued its first public statement on the center, saying the center would be, quote, "An educational and research center with a goal of promoting humane and culturally respectful interview practices among a limited number of members of the armed forces, including medics, has been proposed by a faculty member in the Department of Psychiatry at Yale." And they go on to say that "The center would initially be funded by the Department of Defense. [But] no formal proposal has been submitted yet to the University, and such a center would only be established and funded after rigorous academic and ethical review, and only if its goals are consistent with the University's educational and research missions, and its research is determined to be conducted to the appropriate stringent standards." So, they are basically saying the safeguards are already in place, and the critics are raising problems that don't yet exist. Your response?

**MICHAEL SIEGEL:** Well, it's certainly—it's certainly good that the university is going to take a serious look at this, but I would point out that there was already research conducted at the school of medicine which I believe violated research ethics. In 2010, a study was published in which researchers at the school of medicine studied the use of advanced interrogation techniques to determine whether suspected Islamic terrorists are telling the truth or not. And this study involved Arab immigrants and other Muslim immigrants in New Haven and basically used these immigrants as guinea pigs to test out advanced interrogation techniques. And I think that not only is this unethical, but it violates informed consent, because were these subjects given full information about the Central Intelligence Agency and its use of the advanced interrogation techniques?

But the bigger problem here is that this is not medical research, and it violates the mission of the medical school. This has nothing to do with whether we should be conducting advanced interrogation; it has to do with whether the school of medicine should be involved in developing advanced interrogation techniques. The mission of the school of medicine is to improve the practice of medicine and to improve—to treat disease and improve health. There is no way that this research has any relationship to improving disease or improving health. This is strictly research designed to develop advanced interrogation techniques. That's a military goal, a military responsibility, and it has no place at a school of medicine.

**AMY GOODMAN:** Well, let me read part of a comment by Professor Morgan that was posted online under a [blog post](#) criticizing the proposed center at Yale University

where he would train special operations forces in interviewing techniques. He wrote, quote, "I am opposed to the terrible interrogation methods we have all learned about in the news from the previous and current administrations. I have no interest nor involvement with any activities that would support or aid interrogation efforts and you are very close to libel by implying this." Professor Siegel, your response?

**MICHAEL SIEGEL:** Well, I think that we have to separate two issues here. The first issue is the proposed center, and then the other issue is the already conducted research. It's very true that the proposed center does not involve interrogation, and it doesn't train interrogators. What the proposed center is going to do, it would be to train interviewer—sorry, to train special ops forces in interviewing techniques. This is not interrogation. This would most likely be interviewing of civilians. So, Dr. Morgan is absolutely correct in pointing out that that center doesn't involve interrogation.

However, the previous research that he conducted that was published in 2010 does involve the use of advanced interrogation, and specifically what that involved was monitoring the electrocardiogram, basically using special equipment that was put on the subjects, on these Arab subjects, to monitor their heart rhythm and their respiratory rate while they were undergoing interrogation. And they were put in this—in the position of simulating the position of a suspected Islamic terrorist. And they actually did a mock—conducted a mock situation where they either were instructed to lie or not to lie. And so, clearly, this previous research that was done is involved in the development of advanced interrogation techniques.

But I would argue that even the proposed work, which has nothing to do with interrogation but just with interviewing, has no place at the Yale School of Medicine, because the school of medicine should not be a place for military training, to achieve military objectives. If these were military physicians coming in to learn medical techniques, or nurses or other military health personnel, that would be fine. That would be perfectly appropriate. But the school of medicine is not the place to train military personnel in interviewing techniques.

**JUAN GONZÁLEZ:** And I'd like to ask Alex Lew, the—how—why you got involved in this effort, and what's been the reaction among other students, undergraduate and graduate students, at Yale over the controversy?

**ALEX LEW:** Sure. I got involved after it came to the attention of a group that I'm involved in on campus called Students Unite Now, whose—it's a sort of a student organizing group that tries

to make Yale more accountable to its constituents. So when we saw that  
*Herald*  
and the  
*Yale Daily News*

*The Yale*

had reported on this center only two months before they reported it was scheduled to open, that seems to us like a really good example of the problems that we see commonly at Yale. So, for example, it seemed to us that this was another example of Yale's lack of transparency. So, recently, Yale went through a lightning-fast presidential search process to find the successor to President Levin, who's stepping down. It took two months. There was no input from students. Yale has also moved ahead with a plan to erect a campus in Singapore, a liberal arts campus in Singapore, which has—a country with human rights issues. And faculty and students have expressed concern about that, to no avail.

And so, with this example, it was only through a fluke that we even found out about this center before it was opened. And we think that it raises serious questions about, for example, the mission of the university. The statement that the university gave recently makes it sort of sound like these Green Berets are going to be trained in almost a bedside manner, the type of thing that the psychiatrists use already and that they train their students of medicine in, but that seems inconsistent with a lot of the information that we've received about the center. For example, they will be bringing in theatrical pickpocket Apollo Robbins to teach at the center in the sort of methods of deception and manipulation of attention that he has developed as a pickpocket. So, all of these pointed to a lack of transparency.

And especially after we wrote the op-ed, it's been getting a lot of attention on campus. There are certainly students who support the center, but there's also a growing number of students, undergraduate and graduate, who do feel like there are problems with this center and are worried about how it will impact New Haven's immigrant community and how it just sets even further precedent for both the mixing of military objectives, U.S. military objectives, with university objectives and Yale's lack of a need to sort of consult the people who will be affected by these decisions before making them.

**AMY GOODMAN:** Nathalie Batrville, can you talk about your own personal background that makes you raise questions about what Yale is doing?

**NATHALIE BATRAVILLE:** I mean, I think a lot of students, you know, either based on their personal background or based on the research that they've conducted, research in terms of the history of the U.S.'s involvement—the history of U.S. foreign policy, are really concerned about the fact that intelligence—you know, one of the stated goals of the center is to improve the

quality of military intelligence. And military intelligence does not exist in a vacuum. It has objectives, and we have to question what those objectives are.

And in terms of the cases that I'm most familiar with, one of them is my personal family's history. My family is from Haiti. Haiti was occupied by the United States between 1915 and 1934. And my great-great-uncle was actually part of the resistance movement that was trying to fight the U.S. Marines who were occupying Haiti, and he died trying to protect Haiti's independence, Haiti's freedom. And, you know, my personal research actually is on the—on the Duvalier regime, on François Duvalier and Jean-Claude Duvalier's regime. And I was actually reading, very—you know, shortly before finding out about all this, I was reading up on the U.S.'s support of François and Jean-Claude Duvalier's regimes—financial support, logistical support—in helping to keep him in place. This was a brutal dictatorship that killed tens of thousands of people.

And so, when we say that we are just helping to improve the—whether it's through interviewing techniques, you know, we—there's no way to control what are the ultimate goals that these techniques will be used to advance and whether those are, you know, morally defensible or not. Recent examples are obviously, you know, fabricated weapons of mass destruction. And so, I think—I think there is really cause for concern in terms of—in terms of what this represents and in terms of whether a university can really, as we said in our op-ed article, align itself with U.S. foreign policy in such a way.

And there's also issues with—you know, in terms of trying to—I think it's impossible to control how this will be used, but, you know, the larger questions of transparency are also important because the rules in terms of disclosure and what is top secret for a university are quite different than those for the military. And so, there's sort of like—I think that there is a problem insofar as which would trump which—you know, the university's rules about transparency or the military's? And so, these are all reasons why we think that this at the very least would require a broad consultation that would involve people in the community and the students and the students and the faculty.

**JUAN GONZÁLEZ:** Well, it should come as no surprise that some students at Yale disagree with you. In an editorial supporting the proposed interview training center, Yale sophomore Will Davenport wrote, quote, ""when we have the opportunity to enhance the effectiveness of special operations groups designed to chase terrorism to the edges of the earth, I hope we can unite behind a common bond of humanity and support techniques that may very well save lives on both sides of the fight." Alex, your response?

**ALEX LEW:** Sure. I think that, you know, his statement that these special operations forces are designed to chase terrorism to the very ends of the earth, the response to that is exactly what Nathalie was just talking about. Actually, the purpose of the special operations forces is to achieve United States foreign policy goals. Now, at times, those goals may include morally defensible things. That's true. But basically what Yale would be doing in starting this center and bringing in Green Berets to train them in sort of effective lie detection techniques is that they would be increasing—I mean, as Will Davenport says, they'd be increasing the effectiveness of the U.S. military at achieving its goals. Now, why should Yale be doing that? I think that we would all agree that Yale shouldn't necessarily do that for other militaries, right? If we set up a center that allowed us to—even of our allies, right—that allowed us to train British military operatives or French military operatives or Chinese military operatives, I think that we'd all recognize that Yale could not blindly align itself with whatever fickle foreign policy goals those countries have. But especially given the concerns that Nathalie has brought up about past uses of, you know, the U.S. military to achieve not necessarily moral foreign policy goals, it's especially worrisome. So I think that Will Davenport's view is based on a sort of naive assumption that the U.S. military can do no wrong.

**AMY GOODMAN:** In a report about Professor Morgan's study of interrogation methods that was published in the journal *Psychophysiology*, he and his co-authors described it this way: quote, "the participants in this study were from a non-American, Arabic speaking culture. Given the relative paucity of detecting deception studies in non-acclulturated participants requiring the assistance of a translator, these data provide a step toward understanding deception in a unique context that exists for real-world investigators." Professor Siegel, I was wondering if you could just wrap up. Again, I wish Professor Morgan, Dr. Morgan, had joined us today. He said he would only start talking about this publicly when there was a center. He says this is just proposed.

**MICHAEL SIEGEL:** Well, again, the—there's two different issues here. The study that you're talking about is one that was already conducted, and that's different from what will happen at the center. The center involves interviewing, and the study involved actual advanced interrogation. And I think there's a larger issue here. And the larger issue is really: What are legitimate uses of medicine, and what should medicine be involved in? And I think, with that, Yale has now crossed a line. There are nefarious purposes to which medicine can be used. I mean, for example, one could use medicine to design biological weapons. Clearly, everyone would agree that the Yale School of Medicine should not be involved in helping to achieve that military objective. But I think that using the practice of medicine and medical research to help design advanced interrogation techniques, or even just regular civilian intelligence-gathering techniques, interviewing techniques, is not an appropriate use of medicine. The practice of medicine was designed to improve people's health. And the school of medicine should not be taking part in either training or research that is primarily designed to enhance military

objectives. That's not an appropriate use of medicine. And the bottom line is, I think it's a perversion of medicine, and that's the greatest harm that I fear that is coming from this.

**AMY GOODMAN:** Well, I want to thank you so much for being with us. Michael Siegel, Boston University professor of psychiatry, a 1990 graduate of Yale medical school, has written a letter to Yale medical school saying he will not support the school anymore if they do open this center. Nathalie Batrville is a Yale graduate student, and Alex Lew, Yale sophomore; both wrote an op-ed piece in the Yale paper protesting the establishment of this center. And we will continue to follow the controversy, so stay tuned. This is *Democracy Now!*  
We'll be back in a minute.

[Nathalie Batrville](#), a graduate student in the French Department at Yale University. She helped start a petition against the proposed interview training center for special operations forces and co-authored an editorial with an undergraduate student, Alex Lew, titled "DoD Plans are Shortsighted, Unethical." Her family is originally from Haiti.

[Alex Lew](#), a sophomore in Yale's Berkeley College.